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What Iris doesn't know

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FALL BOOK ISSUE

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Robert G. Hoyt on ABORTING AMERICA

Maureen Mullarkey on THE OBSTACLE RACE

Pheme Perkins on GNOSTIC GOSPELS

David O'Brien on WITH CLUMSY GRACE

Thomas Powers on NUCLEAR QUESTION

James Finn on JAMES T. FARRELL

John Garvey on MYSTICISM IN PRINT

The poet as theologian of secularity

Lawrence S. Cunningham on WALLACE STEVENS

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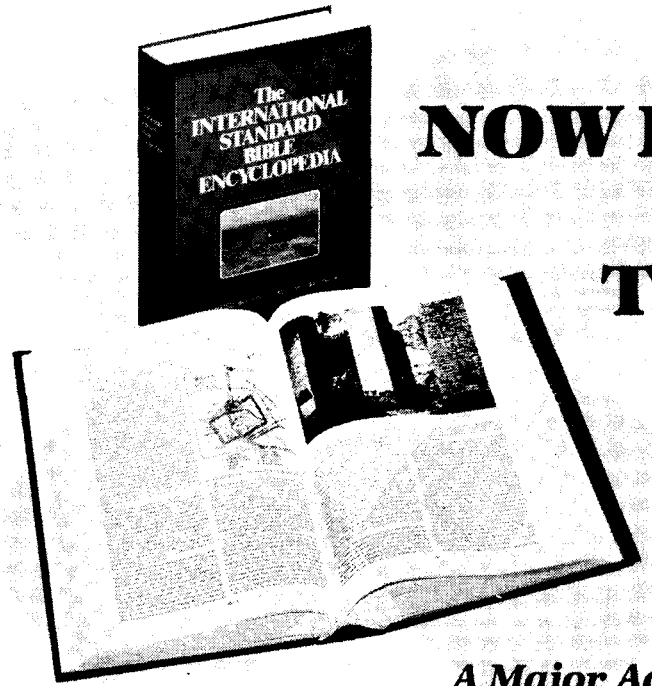

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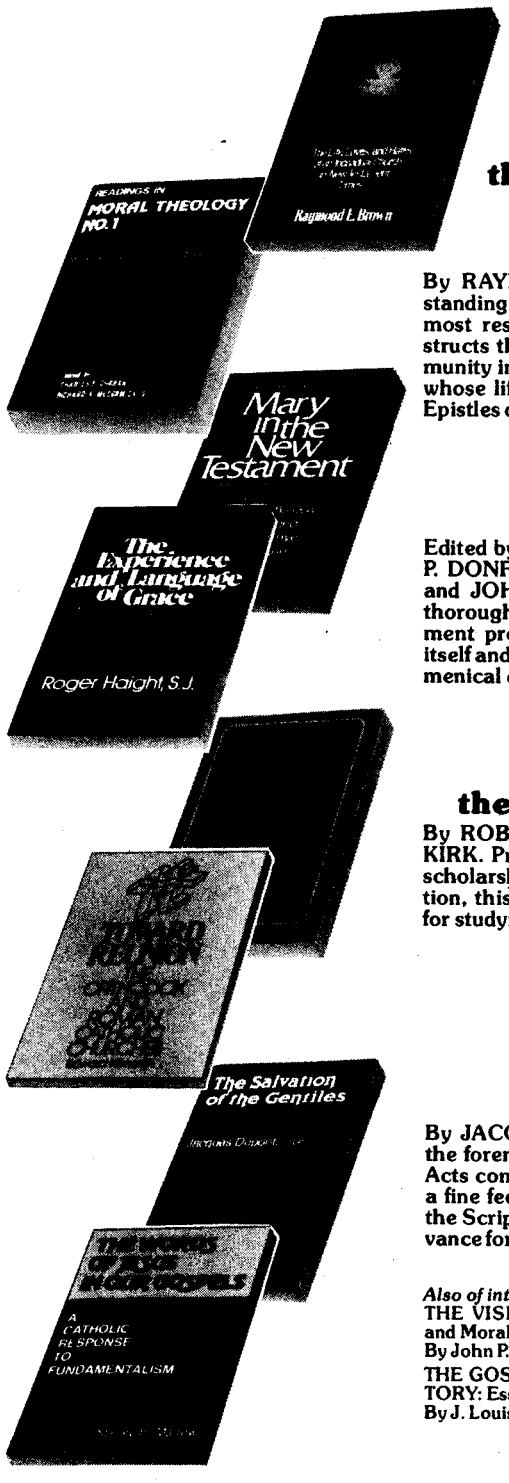
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Correspondence

Murdoch on mothers

Summit, N.J.

To the Editors: I read Anna Maria Murdoch's reflections on motherhood and mythology [Aug. 31] at 3 A.M. one night recently while attending the national meeting of the American Political Science Association. I had picked up *Commonweal* because I couldn't sleep and needed to calm myself by reading in the wee hours. I had left our two small children (ages 4 and 11 months) with my husband to attend this convention, and was about to present a paper on, of all things, the dismal subject of abortion. So I was, in a sense, ripe for the Murdoch piece.

I thought her article was dead right. She touched so many loose and disparate ends. Quite skillfully she wove together myth and imagery to comment on a whole variety of issues related to motherhood—distractions, joy, ambivalence, "How will I ever find time to think and write?", Tillie Olsen's silences, quiet, frustration. Reading her article was, for me, a centering experience. I'm glad *Commonweal* published it as it is such a fine expression of feminine sensibilities.It touched and moved me.

Encore!

MARY C. SEEGERS

Patience with prejudice

Chatham, Md.

To the Editors: Growing up as a Jew in an entirely Christian neighborhood during the '40s and early '50s taught me more about bigotry than I wanted to know, particularly—and I should like to pass this on to John Garvey ["The Ugly Little Secret," Sept. 28]—that there is no weapon which is effective against the bigot.

To reason with the bigot, to beat oneself with the sins of one's ancestors and try to point out their good actions is like trying to use geometry to prove that God exists. The bigot doesn't read history or care about Crusades and Inquisitions; he/she looks inside a twisted heart and finds there the "Armies of the Pope if Kennedy is elected," or "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," because it is in that twisted heart that such ideas are born.

We can respond, indeed we must, but it is to the others, to our neighbors whose minds are not made up. We can do it in small ways, by loosening us/them bonds in our classroom; by taking our own children to the places where others worship and by inviting others to come with us—and not just on Brotherhood Week.

We can set up cross/cultural study groups and use Buber and Heschel, Teresa and More, not to proselytize, but to enjoy together. The Rabbis say, "When two study at one table, the Schechina sits between."

In this, as in all things, the answer is education with patience and love. But don't expect the bigot to listen. And don't ever, ever apologize for the sins of the fathers. Ignorance and repression were as rampant at Spring Garden School as at St. Agnes's.

Let us recall that, as historians, we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of judging another period by the standards of our own. Yet, we heed the obligation to do better.

Procedamus in pacem.

SONDRA GORDON LANGFORD

Review reviewed

Ranchos de Taos, N.M.

To the Editors: I wish, however belatedly, to thank Sidney Callahan for her careful reading and May 25th review of my book, *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland* (University of California Press). At the same time I would like to reply to a few of her not-so-well-taken points.

Dr. Callahan concludes that aspects of my holistic cultural diagnosis of the etiology of mental illness in western Ireland are "muddled and filled with internal contradictions." Her only example is that although I discuss Irish "ambivalence" toward children (evidenced in patterns of ridicule and corporal punishment and in low maternal warmth and hostility), I *also* cite instances of "extraordinary nurturance on the part of both men and women in tradition and folklore." But aren't such contradictions the very soul of "ambivalence"—or did I select the wrong word? Are anthropologists alone in noting that contradictions and inconsistencies between the "ideal" (traditions, folklore) and the "real" (observed behavior) are, generally speaking, the norm in most societies? In recording such inconsistencies among rural villages I attempted to portray the complexity of the social and psychological setting in western Ireland.

If Dr. Callahan finds my qualitatively based analysis of Irish parenting "unconvincing," I would refer her to the most recent issue of the *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* (summer 1979) for a quantitative attitudinal study of nearly 500 Irish mothers by Anne McKenna (University College, Dublin) which similarly portrays the Irish mother as "overly-controlling" and "hostile" toward her children.

Ms. Callahan questions my discussion of corporal punishment because "the reported complaints about the physical punishment of children come from the villagers themselves." From whom else should the reports have come, if not from the mouths of children and their own parents? From outside agents of social control, perhaps? (few and far between). Social workers? (none in evidence). Teachers? (they were among the main perpetrators of corporal punishment, according to students).

Most unfairly, perhaps, Dr. Callahan protests that I show "little familiarity with the recent work in [cognitive aspects of] child development," and that I rely

(Continued on page 639)

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SHOULD WE BAIL CHRYSLER OUT?

FIRST THE Chrysler Corporation wanted a $1 billion advance against the tax credits it is earning by operating in the red. Told that this was out of the question ($250 million in aid to the Lockheed Corporation was narrowly approved by Congress in 1971), Chrysler then submitted a financial bail-out plan calling for $1.2 billion in immediate and standby federal loan guarantees, a sum Treasury Secretary G. William Miller promptly called "way out of line." The plan had to be reworked, he said, in order to bring the total guarantee requested below the $1 billion mark.

As of this moment, Chrysler projects losses of $1.073 billion for 1979—which would be the largest loss ever reported by an American corporation. By guaranteeing loans to Chrysler, the government would assure lenders of repayment, and the arrangement would also assure a low interest rate for the corporation. If the rescue operation is approved, Chrysler estimates that its loss would be cut to $482 million in 1980, and for 1981 it projects a $393 million profit.

Chrysler blames its plight on three factors: the difficulties arising from government regulations mandating better mileage figures, the shift away from profitable larger cars because of the oil shortage, and the general economic recession. To this, outside observers would add management incompetence. In any case, without federal assistance Chrysler claims that its condition would confront the nation with an "extremely serious" situation. The company employs 140,000 workers in the United States and Canada. A shutdown of its activities, it estimates, would result in the loss of 200,000 to 300,000 jobs and a total cost to taxpayers of $1 billion. A study conducted for the Congressional Budget Office estimated that a Chrysler collapse would reduce employment nationwide by 500,000 to 600,000 persons. Another study, this one conducted by the Department of Transportation, makes similar predictions: at least 97,000 domestic auto workers out of their jobs, as well as 15,000 in Canada and 7500 in Mexico, plus an additional 180,000 employees of companies that supply parts to Chrysler and 100,000 employees of dealers. In Detroit, for example, the study concluded, unemployment would increase from 8.7 percent to as high as 19 percent, which would be a disaster. "One needs no strong reminder of previous social unrest in the Detroit area," said the Transportation Department study cryptically. The study also concluded that a Chrysler shutdown would cost $1.5 billion a year in unemployment benefits and erode federal income taxes by $500 million.

Details vary from study to study, but the figures in all of them are gloomy. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the Treasury Department remains unconvinced. All such extreme estimates are based, says Treasury, on a "worst case" situation: the complete shutdown of all Chrysler facilities, which Treasury officials do not believe a likely outcome. They say a more realistic outcome would be shrunken

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production, the sale of assets to foreign or domestic competitors, and continued operation by many Chrysler units. However, even the most optimistic estimates agree that the impact of a Chrysler failure would be severe, in terms of jobs, unemployment benefits paid out and revenue in taxes lost.

It was against this background that the United Auto Workers and Chrysler started contract talks. The UAW rejected the idea of a two-year freeze on wages and benefits, which would have amounted to a 25 percent reduction in the standard of living for union members, but UAW President Douglas A. Fraser suggested a contract that would only keep workers abreast of rising costs, without the raise won from Ford and GM. After brief bargaining the settlement reached reflected this position, saving Chrysler $203 million in the next two years compared with provisions of other contracts in the industry and putting UAW's Fraser on the Chrysler board of directors, where he will undoubtedly renew his call for federal help for the ailing auto giant. Clearly the auto union is intent on trying to keep Chrysler afloat and save 110,000 members' jobs.

Should the United States bail Chrysler out? The immediate impulse in a more-or-less free enterprise system is to say no. That's what Thomas Murphy of General Motors said; he was outraged at the idea of a subsidy for an inefficient competitor. The *Wall Street Journal* took a similar dim view, and so too did many in Congress. The *New York Times* said that if President Carter can enact his guaranteed loan program for Chrysler, it should be called the Large Corporation Management Protection Act of 1979, and said that there was something unseemly about the haste with which the White House went to work on the deal. And the *Times* asked some hard questions: why, for instance, could not Chrysler be sold to a foreign manufacturer? Why did the supposedly hard-pressed corporation continue to pay dividends right into 1979? And what is there to make us think that Chrysler management would make wiser decisions in the future than it had in the past?

Good questions, all of them, although they do not touch on the extent to which big corporations (including GM) already get public subsidies; we share many of the reservations expressed about bailing out the most inefficient of the Big Three. But with unemployment where it is, with a recession that may be a real depression looming, and with a presidential election next year, it will be hard for Congress to say no to President Carter's plan to prevent Chrysler from going down the fiscal drain. If we are right and this is indeed the case, then aid should be given, not on a more-of-the-same basis but within an imaginative and creative legislative framework.

Chrysler is the tenth largest industrial corporation in the United States, and its present plight provides an opportunity for some meaningful social innovation in this country. In West Germany labor holds half the board seats in 700 corporations involving almost six million workers. No one can claim that the West German economy has suffered as a result, and the phenomenon is spreading; any company wishing to incorporate under the European Community as a European corporation rather than a national one will soon be required by law to have workers on its board. Why cannot Chrysler be made a U.S. experiment with a giant corporation along these lines? As far as that goes, why cannot an aid plan be devised that would involve some conversion of ownership into the hands of Chrysler workers? Worker ownership might well give a shot in the arm to the present dismal rate of productivity growth in the auto industry, and in general it could only be a boon in an age of increasing absentee ownership. Lastly, and not unimportantly, provision should be made for significant public interest representation on the Chrysler board of directors. What better chance will we have to begin the necessary enlargement of the social vision of these great corporations?

Worker participation on the board of directors that is numerically significant, widespread worker ownership of stock, public members on the board of directors—these should all be part of the Chrysler deal. If it is in the public interest to bail Chrysler out, a start should at least be made toward transforming the company into a true public interest corporation.

THE LABEL GAME

We have grown accustomed to the more hysterical misrepresentations that issue from various factions on either side of the abortion debate. Recently a more subtle, and hence more interesting, example came our way.

It was a press release from the Alan Guttmacher Institute, an affiliate of Planned Parenthood, that caught our attention. "Federal financial support for abortions for poor women should be restored," it began, "according to Daniel Callahan, prominent ethicist and a former editor of the Catholic magazine *Commonweal*." Now this was passably strange. Why mention Daniel Callahan's *former* link to a *Catholic* magazine in the first sentence when his *current* position as director of the Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences—much more pertinent to his views on government policy toward abortion, in any case—is relegated to the second paragraph?

The answer came soon. A story appearing in the *Chicago Sun-Times* carried the headline: "End Abortion Bias, Catholic Urges." Based on a UPI dispatch, in turn based on the press release, the story began: "A prominent Roman Catholic ethician, Daniel Callahan, urged the government Sunday to end 'arbitrary discrimination' by restoring federal payments for abortion on demand. A former editor of the Catholic magazine *Commonweal*, Callahan said poor women—just as those who can pay—have a legal right to abortion."

How many newspapers ran the same or similar stories? At least one radio newscast in the New York area spoke of the "prominent Roman Catholic" who urged government funding for abortions.

Behind this flurry of publicity was an article by Daniel Callahan in the September/October issue of *Family Planning Perspectives*, a journal published by the Alan Guttmacher Institute and Planned Parenthood. Nowhere in this article does Callahan speak as a Catholic—indeed in recent years he has carefully refrained from identifying himself as a Catholic at

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all. Nowhere does he speak of "abortion on demand." And in fact he argues that the case for federal funding of abortion for the poor should *not* be argued on the basis of "legal right" but of "general public purpose and general public welfare" policies toward the poor.

Callahan's argument is not free of muddle—whose is, in this treacherous area?—on the question of federal funding for abortion services. At one point, he insists that "whatever else it may have decided, *Roe* v. *Wade* did not establish the right of a woman to obtain an abortion at public expense." Good public policy, in effect, might lead a legislature to fund abortion services, but that is not a position to be derived from constitutional rulings. But later, after numerous references to "the right of free choice," Callahan concludes that "the right to an abortion would be de facto discriminatory if government policy precluded those unable to pay because of poverty from exercising their right."

There may be subtleties here which escape us, but it does seem that, at one moment, Callahan wants to rescue this topic from the sphere of "rights" and place it in the sphere of "prudence" but, at the next moment, he can't quite do it. He seems to want to submit the problem to legislatures rather than courts, but without sufficient notice of the fact that at least the federal legislature has overwhelmingly acted on this issue, and the whole drift of the pro-choice movement has been to find a way to override this majority. Thus in criticizing the argument that government should withdraw from such a morally sensitive area, Callahan points out "there is no principle in our policy which allows individual taxpayers to pick and choose those things they would like to see their tax money spent for. . . . What is open to citizens is to work politically to change those policies to which they object. But once a policy has been put in place by the normal democratic political process, then individual taxpayers cannot be allowed to act in disregard of that policy." But of course the opponents of Medicaid funding for abortions are not "individual taxpayers" protesting a democratically established policy; at least on this point "the normal democratic political process" has supported their position. It is the pro-choice lobby that wants tax monies to go for a specific purpose *despite* the majority decision of Congress.

This point aside, Callahan's article is filled with sound observations. He indicates how unrealistic it would be to consider Medicaid funding of abortion in keeping with "a policy of strict neutrality." He warns that there is also "something unsavory and morally evasive in arguing for abortion services as a means of coping with spiraling welfare costs" though he believes that the plight of the poor calls for abortion funding. In the long run, he concludes, "the abortion rights movement will be judged by the extent to which it recognizes the moral ambiguity of abortion, and makes this sense of ambiguity clear by working as hard to reduce abortions as to increase their availability."

But in view of the resulting publicity, it is Callahan's reflections on the religious dimension that is most ironic. Abortion rights proponents run grave risks in "trying to define the abortion issue as essentially religious. . . . I have seen nothing to convince me that abortion is inherently a more religious issue than justice, peace or the general social welfare." And what about Catholicism? "The most obvious test of bigotry is not that of outright persecution; it is whether representatives of one's group are always singled out for a religious identification. Roman Catholic legislators opposed to abortion are usually labeled as 'Roman Catholic legislators'—others are simply 'legislators.' "

One might add that ethicists who have a Roman Catholic connection in their background are liable to have that prominently displayed in press releases rather than more relevant labels. The misrepresentation in the newspaper and radio reporting is directly traceable to the calculated emphasis on "Catholic magazine *Commonweal*" in the original press release. Callahan was not writing as a Catholic dissenting from the institutional church's position on Medicaid funding. His article was, in the main, addressed to abortion rights advocates and warned them, among other things, against clumsy efforts at religious manipulation. It would seem wise to us if the people who sponsor and edit *Family Planning Perspectives* would not only publish articles like Callahan's and write press releases about them—but take them to heart as well.

Of several minds: *Thomas Powers*

KIND WORD FOR CARTER

DO PEOPLE REALLY MISS LBJ & NIXON?

BEING PRESIDENT isn't all roses. They have their bad moments too. Sitting around the White House on a rainy November Sunday, with the papers of a dozen cities strewn about, sick of reading, sick of talking, sick of the sullen petulance of un-pleaseable Washington, presidents must wonder if it was really a good idea to go after the job. It's not their failure to satisfy all the people all the time which gets them down, one imagines, but the ocean of grey print, a great carping wave of it washing in every week, which suggests it's impossible to satisfy any of the people any of the time. Even so relentlessly healthy a spirit as Jimmy Carter's must surrender to doubt and gloom from time to time. Standing at the bulletproof window, watching the drops of rain slide down the glass, he must wonder what he could have done to deserve . . . Ted Kennedy . . .

To tell the truth, I wonder too. Chappaquiddick was an awful mess, and it

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always will be an awful mess, but Chappaquiddick aside Kennedy is a serious man and worthy opponent. He stands for things which matter. But why does he have to run now, Carter must ask himself; and why do so many people treat his advent as if he presented the first ray of sunlight after a long dark night? Doesn't anybody remember Lyndon Johnson? Doesn't anybody remember Richard Nixon? What can possibly explain Washington's extraordinary resistance to everything he has done or tried to do, Carter must want to know, and to tell the truth, I'd like to know too.

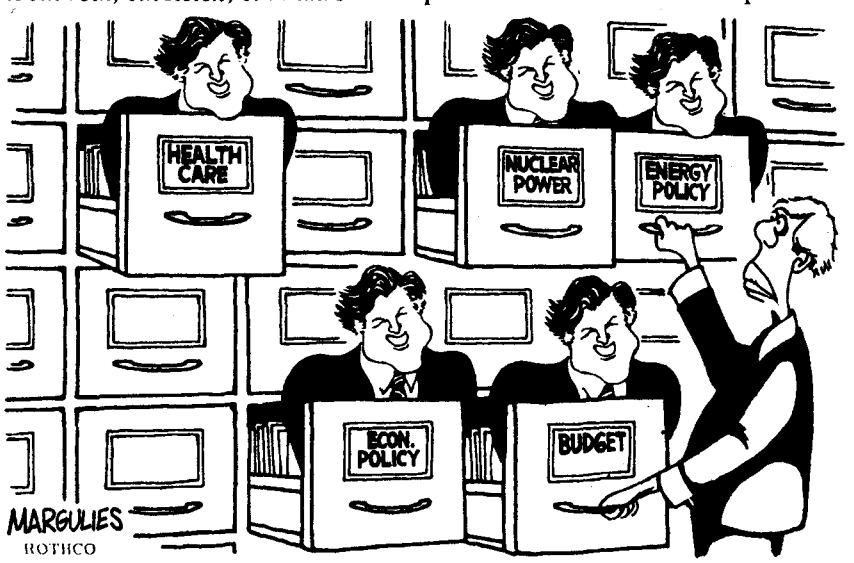
Carter has been a good president. Of course this doesn't mean he's solved every national problem, which are always very numerous. He hasn't squeezed oil out of the ground, or halted thirty years of decline in the nation's cities, or found a substitute for the family car, or slowed inflation while booming the economy, or satisfied all the just demands of women and minorities, or persuaded the Russians and Japanese to stop killing whales, or sprung all the world's political prisoners. These and other failures make a lot of people unhappy. It is easy to collect detailed indictments of Carter charging shocking surrender to special interests—Southern textile manufacturers, say, or Big Oil, or environment Luddites, or the military-industrial complex, or starry-eyed pacifists. The special interests are generally twice as numerous as the unsolved problems. This is healthy; the alternative to special interests is *ein volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*. In addition to being numerous the indictments are hard to answer, involving, as they tend to do, highly particular changes of language in subparagraph 21, annex two, of an amendment to a motion to restrict debate on a vote to table a bill to revise Public Law 281 providing free lunches for the children of minorities in designated urban communities under 20,000 in population which have been declared disaster relief areas within the last five years—or whatever. Political debate requires a lot of homework, and the charges of moral turpitude flung about so freely rarely indicate anything more than the fact that this—whatever it may be—means a lot to somebody. Presidents are the subject of unreasonable expectations, and cannot be fairly judged by the ocean of particular public complaint. The real test of presidents is not what they have failed to do—invariably a great deal—but what they have done.

It is hard to know why the press and the public have been so grudging of Carter's achievements. Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon had the same problem, but in their cases Vietnam and Watergate offer obvious explanations. There are no disasters of that sort to explain the airy, off-handed, almost willful spirit in which otherwise serious people have belittled Carter's contributions to peace.

This is a serious matter. Presidents are political creatures. If international agreements, disarmament, military self-restraint, and the settlement of dangerous local conflicts win nothing from the public—not even from the sophisticated public which really follows these things—but carping or bored yawns, then presidents eventually are going to get the point and focus their attention on other matters. The criticism of Carter's initiatives in foreign policy is natural and to be expected; people disagree. The worrying thing is the nearly universal indifference, even contempt, for what he has done outside of his own administration. The reaction to three things in particular makes me wonder what the rest of us can possibly be thinking about.

(1) The Camp David agreement between Israel and Egypt marks the first substantial step towards peace in the Middle East in thirty years. It shifts the focus of the struggle—the thing which it is *about*—from Israel's right to exist, to sovereignty over the West Bank. The agreement also divides Israel's traditional enemies in a manner which makes another full-scale war like 1973 extremely unlikely. The simple fact is that Syria and Jordan do not have the strength to challenge Israel on their own and both know it, while Israel's other enemies—principally Iraq and Libya—have no way of getting at her. This situation may not last forever; Israel might squander the present opportunity to reach an accommodation with her neighbors. But for the present Israel is not seriously threatened with a major war, much less the apocalyptic defeat which always loomed in the background of earlier wars.

You would think—I would think—that this achievement, for which Carter deserves substantial credit, would be much remarked. The contrary is the case. The continuing problem of the Palestinians seems to trouble press and public more than an Israeli-Egyptian peace reassures them. It is the absence of a credible threat of war, on which the Palestinians have always depended in the past, that inclines them to negotiate now. But this does not seem to be noticed, and critics of the agreement point to the absence of Syria and Jordan as if that meant nothing had changed. Like the Palestinians, both countries must now moderate their own demands, or stew ineffectually on the sidelines. The Arab world is well aware of this fact; why aren't the Americans?



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(2) Harry S Truman sent a secret army from Burma into China, involved the United States in the Greek civil war, supported the French in Indochina, and sent hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers to Korea. Dwight D. Eisenhower sent the Marines into Lebanon, approved four major attempts to topple foreign governments with the CIA, and elected to replace the French in Indochina. John F. Kennedy authorized a secret invasion of Cuba and committed the United States to the military rescue of South Vietnam. Lyndon Johnson sent troops to Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. Richard Nixon invaded Cambodia. Gerald Ford sent the Marines in to recapture the crew of the *Mayaguez* and secretly tried to involve the United States in a civil war in Angola. Many of the architects of these old adventures, using all the old arguments, strongly urged Jimmy Carter to intervene in Ethiopia, Iran and Nicaragua, but he would not do it. You can say what you like about the military initiatives of Carter's predecessors, but he is the first American president since Herbert Hoover who has not ordered American soldiers to kill or be killed in faraway places. Maybe he's just lucky. In that case, go with a winner.

(3) Carter negotiated and signed the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty and has even advocated *ridding* the world of nuclear weapons. This may sound like an obvious idea, but it's not. No other leader who has them has ever suggested such a thing. SALT II, as we all know, leaves enough missiles and warheads in place to reduce the world's cities to something resembling downtown Berlin in May, 1945. It does nothing to make war less likely, unless the negotiation of successive treaties, with a promise of further agreements to come, makes war less likely. SALT II is an imperfect step, but it's better than standing still, and its opponents seem to be advocating an about-face march right back into the heart of the Cold War. If Carter was too bold and hopeful of disarmament when he entered the White House, he has been sober and steadfast in its pursuit ever since. His enemies—and on this point Kennedy is not one of them—see this as a weakness, and if they succeed in defeating him the next agreement—if there is a next—will be a great deal more difficult to negotiate, sign and ratify.

Carter has been a good president, and he even seems to be a good man. His worst enemy is a kind of public ennui. There can't be many people who really miss Johnson and Nixon, but quite a few, it seems, find it hard to abandon the political tone appropriate to struggle, crisis and confrontation. They attack Carter as if he were as dangerous as his predecessors, but better disguised. The right seems to consider him as the reincarnation of Joseph Chamberlain, giving away the Panama Canal and surrendering to the Russians. The left describes him as a creature of the moneyed interests and a secret enemy of the poor. The center appears to be plain bored, and I am confused.

It's natural that the Republicans should be organizing to run against Carter; that's the nature of the system. But why does his own party seem so ready to abandon him? Reading the newspapers was one long agony from February, 1965 until August, 1974. A quiet front page, it seems to me, is a sign of public health and a call for rejoicing. What has Carter done to deserve rejection and defeat? What has Kennedy done to justify a giddy Democratic rush to embrace him? I can't think of a good answer to either question, and I suspect that when the time comes to vote, the public won't either.

THOMAS POWERS

Of several minds: *John Garvey*

PEOPLE WHO ARE FIRE

RECOVERING MYSTICISM

THERE HAS been a debate for years over the place of mysticism in religion—is it central, or an aberration? Is it something all religions have in common, or are some more prone to it than others, the way certain families exhibit a tendency toward male pattern baldness? The word "mysticism" has a pejorative meaning lately. After his Harvard address Alexander Solzhenitsyn was accused of mysticism for pointing out the public effect of living in a spiritual void; in the opinion of his critics, the "right kind" of religion should be private—"like button collecting," as Lenin used to say.

The word asks for it, carrying as it does all those whiffs of mysterious knowledge and secret understanding. The over- and under-tones of mystery rub us the wrong way. Still, it is a haunting presence, since it forms an undeniable part of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. A definition of "mysticism" is difficult. It is common to find it defined as "an experience of one-ness with God," something which involves a radical loss of self. Catherine of Genoa described it as "the union of He who Is with she who is not." But mystics have also pointed out the danger of seeking experience; the experience is in a sense totally beside the point, apparently, and there is an insistence that the self which seems to be lost comes into its own, and is only truly itself, in this encounter.

Like a satisfactory definition of poetry, a satisfactory definition of mysticism is probably impossible. Paul writes of words "so secret that human lips may not repeat them." At the close of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein says that the mystical is not to be found in *what* the world is, but *that* it is—an echo of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, whose anonymous author spoke of finding "a blind feeling of thine own being . . . Look up then lightly and say to thy Lord, 'That that I am, Lord, I offer unto Thee, for Thou it art.' And think nakedly, plainly, and boisterously, that thou art as thou art."

In the West, the churches have viewed mystics with suspicion. The wildness of

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the language unsettles people used to precisely formulated doctrines. It is easy to see why a bishop would be upset when Meister Eckhart referred to "the godhead which is higher than God." The mystics are not undogmatic, but they know that dogma is about something which is more than dogma. In *Heaven in Ordinarie* (Templegate, $14.95) Noel Dermot O'Donoghue refers to "the way of the contemplative transformation of doctrine, the way into those depths of which dogma is but the surface." We like our dogmas safe and sure, and the people who remind us that they are fire make us uncomfortable.

This desire for safety isn't enough for many people, who recognize obscurely that a truly human life requires radical transformation. They don't look to the churches or synagogues for guidance these days. Instead, they turn for help to the array of therapies which promise transformation, or, more seriously, they turn to Eastern mystical traditions. Several observers have complained—legitimately, I think—that the abandonment of church and synagogue has come about, at least in part, because of Christian and Jewish inattention to the Western mystical tradition.

Paulist Press deserves a great deal of credit for doing something about this. I have seen six volumes of Paulist's *Classics of Western Spirituality* series, and all are worth having. (The price of each volume is $9.95 in cloth, $6.95 in paper.) Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* is a good example of the rich Eastern Christian approach to scripture, where symbols are seen lurking behind every tree and bush, an approach which can appear unnecessarily burdened with allegory, until it suddenly bursts into a point so overwhelmingly effective that you wonder whether you haven't been missing something all along.

The emphasis in *The Life of Moses* is upon God's limitlessness, and the impossibility of reaching a limit of perfection as we grow toward God. Human perfection is not a goal, but a process in which we participate; it cannot be "arrived at" (any more than we can find limits to the life of God), but consists in a movement forward. *The Life of Moses* is an illustration of Gregory's belief that "he who desires to behold God sees the object of his longing in always following him. The contemplation of his face is the unending journey accomplished by following directly behind the Word."

Julian of Norwich's *Showings* is better known to most readers as *Revelations of Divine Love*. This edition offers two authoritative texts, one long and one short, of a classic which is fascinating for many reasons, not the least of them Julian's attention to "God, our Mother." Here is her vision of the whole of creation: "He showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and I perceived that it was as round as any ball. I looked at it and thought: What can this be? And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it, and thus everything has being through the love of God."

Jacob Boehme, the Lutheran mystic, also wrote of the female aspect of divinity. He referred to "Sophia" (in his writing this was not only the Wisdom of God, but the revelation of "God in his depth") in feminine terms. His *The Way to Christ* is part of Paulist's series, and it is good to see it there: Boehme's influence extended to William Blake and John Milton, among other people. His work was a major influence on the Anglican mystic William Law, represented in the series by *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, and The Spirit of Love*. (Law's influence was, like Boehme's, important. The people his spiritual direction and writing touched include John and Charles Wesley, and Samuel Johnson.) *Nahman of Bratslav—The Tales* presents the stories which contain the teaching of Rabbi Nahman, an early Hasidic master of prayer, and a modern Jewish mystic is represented in *Abraham Isaac Kook: The Lights of Penitence, Lights of Holiness, The Moral Principles, Essays, Letters, and Poems*.

Not part of the series, but also a Paulist Press book, *Your Word Is Fire* ($1.95) is a tightly edited introduction, frankly devotional, to the Hasidic tradition of contemplative prayer. The editors (Arthur Green and Barry W. Holtz) have selected provocative and exciting quotations from a number of Hasidic masters, and their arrangement is a helpful one. I like the way these selections, on facing pages, move from something direct to something which might at first seem less concrete; and of course they have to do with one another: "Do not laugh at someone who moves his body, even violently, during prayer. If a man is drowning in a river he makes all kinds of motions to try to save himself. This is not a time for others to laugh." "Prayer is never repeated: the quality of each day's prayer is unlike that of any other. This is the inner meaning of the Mishnah's words: 'He whose prayer is rigid prays without supplication.' This can be seen even in the thoughts which distract us from true prayer; they too are different every day."

One interesting thing about all these books, separated as they are by centuries and traditions, is that they involve a level of discourse which our culture does not take seriously enough. The "story element" in many of these books works on the assumption that symbols indicate real things: what happened to Moses can be spoken of in a way which has directly to do with what happens to us; and Julian's visions were not simply her private fancies, but God's way of making points which matter now to how we live. The Hasidic tradition is full of stories; *Your Word Is Fire* closes with a dark and deliberately unexplained parable. Some things can't be stated, but can only be indicated or drawn forth in signs and symbols. It could be that a lively understanding of this is not at all peripheral, but essential to religious understanding. A religion which is merely ethical and dogmatic can't begin to transform us or work at the depths of the heart. *Your Word Is Fire* tells us, "Do not think that the words of prayer, as you say them, go up to God. It is not the words themselves that ascend; it is rather the burning desire of your heart that rises like smoke toward heaven. If your prayer consists only of words and letters, and does not contain your heart's desire—how can it rise up to God?"

JOHN GARVEY

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The poet as theologian of secularity

LAWRENCE S. CUNNINGHAM

IT SEEMS curious, even paradoxical, that the American poet Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) should attract the attention of large numbers of the theological community in this country. Not curious because Stevens was a vice-president of a large insurance company in Hartford; T. S. Eliot was, after all, a bank clerk and, later, an executive in the publishing world. Not even curious because Stevens seemed so completely and unapologetically the upper class Republican. It was one thing for Eliot to sing paeans to a royalist traditionalism but what does one make of a poet who was a Taft Republican who thought Eisenhower to be a dangerous radical? Beyond all that, Stevens, if one can judge by his letters, was condescending towards blacks, mildly anti-semitic, and a firm believer in the poetry of money. It could be argued, of course, that a poet can reflect all manner of intellectual and social gaucheries and still compel the attention of the literate public. Poor Ezra Pound comes immediately to mind.

The real curiosity is that Stevens, in one sense, was not terribly well informed about theology or the study of religion. He seems to have read very little theology. His criticism of institutional religion was conventional enough. Nor did Stevens have any profoundly original approach to the problems of philosophical culture. Stevens was, as William York Tindall observed, passionately devoted to poetry but an "amateur of ideas" (*Wallace Stevens*, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, XI, p. 11).

How is it that, with such meager credentials, Stevens could be considered by Robert Bellah to be *the* poet of modern secularity? Why should Nathan Scott, Jr. and his many students study the poetry of Stevens with such devotion and thoroughness? Was it more than coincidence that Professor David Tracy should entitle his seminal work *Blessed Rage for Order*, echoing a line from the Stevens poem "Idea of Order at Key West"? Is it true, as J. Hillis Miller has argued in *Poets of Reality* (Harvard, 1965) that Stevens firmly anchored all of his poetry in the acceptance of the Nietzschean concept of the demise of all the gods?

The general reputation of Stevens rests on the fact that the contemporary critical consensus about his work is that his poetry is not only first-rate but one of the benchmarks of high culture in the English-speaking world of this century. Beyond that, Stevens is of further interest to the theologian because his vast poetic output reflected over and over again some of the basic questions that have haunted the modern theologian and the modern philosopher alike: what suffices for human activity and human worth when the old absolutes are gone? Stevens framed this problem quite succinctly in a letter to his old friend Henry Church: "The major poetic in the world is and always has been the idea of God. One of the visible movements of the modern imagination is the movement away from the idea of God. The poetry that created the idea of God will either adopt it to a different intelligence, or create a substitute for it, or make it unnecessary" (*Letters*, New York, 1966, pp. 377-8).

Wallace Stevens's attitude towards religion can be summed up in three statements, of which the third is the most crucial. First, Stevens was convinced that the age of belief had passed and a meaningful belief in God was no longer a possibility for vast numbers of modern people. This sense of agnosticism appeared at an early date in Stevens's long poetic career and he never deviated from it. It is the theme of his justly celebrated "Sunday Morning" (published in his earliest volume of poetry, *Harmonium*-1923) and undergirded poems published years later when his career as a poet was at its most mature stage.

Secondly, and following closely from the first premise, the churches are now museums that only bear testimony to the past experience of belief. They have their right to exist as part of a cultural heritage but their primary function has been abrogated by the change in the intellectual status of things. As museum pieces the churches do not have life and vitality. As Adalaide K. Morris has justly observed, the women who represent Christianity for Stevens (e.g., the high-toned old Christian woman, the woman who is dying of diabetes in "A Thought

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Revolved'' and Canon Aspirin's sister in ''Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction'') share the same characteristics as the churches they attend; ''dreary asceticism, mechanical ritualism, Puritanical primness, and an attenuated ghostliness which makes them seem to drift rather than stride, to exist rather than live'' (*Wallace Stevens: Imagination and Faith*, Princeton, 1974, p. 51). In the poem, ''The Old Lutheran Bells at Home,'' Stevens perfectly captured the nostalgia, the tradition, and, finally, the impotence of the old ecclesiastical tradition. The bells of the church ''are the voices of the pastors calling/And calling like the long echoes in long sleep./ Generations of shepherds to generations of sheep.''

Finally, and most importantly, in this age when there is no direct contact with God(s) either in revelation or in nature we must ask what will replace religion or, better, what device or process is available to us to satisfy the human desire for meaningfulness and to supply an ultimate framework for living in a significant way. Wallace Stevens was convinced that poetry was the obvious replacement for religion. As such Stevens was the heir to the tradition best enunciated in the last century by the British poet and critic Matthew Arnold and the American philosopher (and a teacher of Stevens at Harvard) George Santayana. ''After one has abandoned a belief in god,'' Stevens once wrote, ''Poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption'' (*Opus Posthumous*, New York, 1957, p. 158).

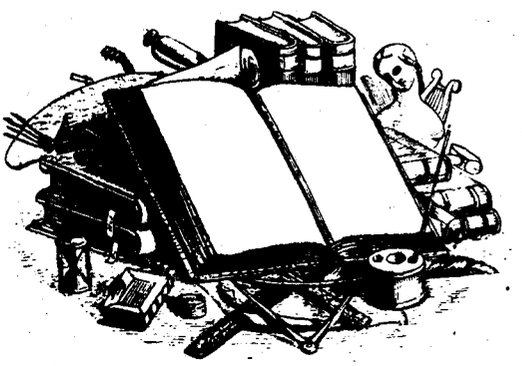
FOR STEVENS, it is the duty of the poet to show that the workings of the human imagination are the primal source of human satisfaction. It is the imagination's alchemical power to project the multiform possibilities of life. The imagination can propose what Stevens has called ''supreme fictions''—fictions that reveal the depth and the potentialities of human experience. It is through the workings of the imagination that the world becomes alive and meaningfulness for us; it is no longer a thing apart. The poetic muse is ''the single artificer of the world/In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea/ Whatever self it had/became the self/that was her song for she was the maker'' (''The Idea of Order at Key West''). The order produced by the poet could well be an illusion, as Stevens himself admitted, but, nonetheless, it elevates people because it provides a ''freshening of life.''

The interplay of the poetic imagination and the world-in-itself, as every student of epistemology recognizes, presents the old problem of just how well the mind grasps the outside world, if indeed, it grasps it at all. Reality, unlit by the imagination, is not enough, according to Stevens, but the real is the base from which one must start. In ''The Man with the Blue Guitar'' Stevens puzzled at length over the interplay of imagination and reality. The blue guitar is the poetic faculty of imagination. What is the correlation between this blue guitar and ''things as they are'' (the phrase echoes Matthew Arnold) in its manifold relationships? Stevens's basic thesis is stated in a pair of couplets at the beginning of the poem:

They said, ''You have a blue guitar
You do not play things as they are.''
The man replied, ''Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar.''

Those two couplets merely state the relationship between the blue guitar and ''things as they are'' in the most basic form. As Helen Vendler has shown (in *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems*, Harvard, 1969, pp. 127ff.) the permutations of the relationship of guitar and reality are manifold: The battle between the two is a permanent one; one becomes the other; they unite and marry; and so on. Stevens was neither naive or titanic enough to think that the interplay of human imagination and reality could be described with ease and/or clarity. One thing that was clear, however, was that ''the thinking of God is smoky dew./The tune is space. The blue guitar/Becomes the place of things as they are,/A composing of senses of the guitar.''

''The Man with the Blue Guitar'' was published in 1937. Five years later in ''Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction'' (1942) Stevens was still concerned with the relationship of the poet to



the world. He was equally convinced that this poetic task of grasping the world was a quasi-religious act. ''Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction'' is a collection of thirty-one poems (each poem composed of seven stanzas) that are exceedingly dense and complex. The entire poem sequence is an act of poetic faith in the ability of poetry to give a kind of peace to the poet through the medium of poetic truth. The poetic claims in ''Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction'' are framed in religious terms. The poem gives an assurance that once was reserved for the believer:

The poem refreshes life so that we share,
For a moment the first idea . . . It satisfies
Belief in an immaculate beginning
And sends us, winged by an unconscious will,
To an immaculate end. . . .

''Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction'' is, in the last analysis, about the poem itself. Stevens came to recognize that excessive preoccupation with the poem, as product of the imagination, could loosen the bond with reality. It could become a mental artifact. Stevens did not want the poem to be merely a mental construct independent of the outside world. If, as he once said about ''The Man with the Blue Guitar,'' reality was a base, it was, nonetheless, *the* base. Stevens did not want to be trapped in his own poetic imagination. Indeed it has been a common criticism of Stevens's poetry that his poetry moves

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almost compulsively from earthly realities to abstract adumbrations of that reality. There is almost a platonic energy that moves Stevens from the *res* to the idea.

From 1946, when Stevens published "Credences of Summer" until the end of his life the poet tried to focus his attention more closely to the things of this earth. He set out this task in succinct lines in "Credences of Summer": "Let's see the very thing and nothing else./Let's see it with the hottest fire of sight./Burn everything not part of it to ash." The definition of this task was easier than its implementation as Stevens recognized: ". . . we live in a place/that is not our own and, much more, not ourselves/And hard it is in spite of blazoned days" ("Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction").

STEVENS made a supreme effort to "see the very thing" in his long and difficult poem "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" (1949). This poem was, as Stevens wrote to a friend, a development of ideas that he had expressed in "Credences of Summer." His intent in "Ordinary Evening" was to get "as close to the ordinary, the commonplace, and the ugly as it is possible for a poet to get. It is not a question of grim reality but of plain reality" (*Letters*, p. 636). "Ordinary Evening" is a long poem of thirty-one stanzas—an extended meditation on the nature of reality and its perception. The theme is announced, with all of its inherent ambiguity, in the opening lines of the poem: "The eye's plain version is a thing apart,/The vulgate of experience. Of this/A few words an and yet and yet and yet—/As part of the never ending meditation. . . ." It becomes apparent to the careful reader that, as the poem progresses, the reality of New Haven's architecture, citizenry, urban grime and natural surroundings do not sufficiently anchor the poet's attention. Despite his clear desire to remain close to "the very thing" his mind moves almost inexorably back to his own creation, the poem of the mind. One example must suffice. Towards the end of the poem (in stanza #30) the poet meditates on the passing of Summer as the "wind has blown the silence of Summer/alone." The poet describes this air until nature is stripped and "cleanness has returned." These powerful images, rooted in nature metaphors, cannot hold the poet to the cleansing power of the oncoming Autumn. He moves instinctively, as it were, from nature to mind: "It is not an empty clearness, a bottomless sight,/It is a visibility of thought,/In which hundreds of eyes, in one mind, see at once."

In an extremely perceptive but, alas, unpublished paper, Bruce Kauffman of Catholic University of America has argued that however much Stevens wanted to revel in "plain reality"—as Gerard Manley Hopkins or Theodore Roethke could—the task was an impossible one for him. According to Kauffman, Stevens's keen awareness of the non-sacral character of the world where the gods no longer reside precluded a basic trust in the beneficence of life which would permit him to start with the common things. Stevens possessed what Allen Tate has called an "angelic imagination"—a distaste for the real and the commonplace combined with a desire to reach out for the essential and the eternal.

KAUFFMAN'S observation helps us to see why Stevens's poetry is so congenial to the theologically literate. Stevens grappled with the meaning of reality all of his poetic life. He wanted to circumscribe reality, appreciate its sanctions, and understand the relationship of the imaginative act to reality. However, he did not, could not, accept the sacramentality of the world. The world itself signified nothing beyond itself save what the imagination could bring to it. The world, to use the language of Mircea Eliade, did not show forth the Sacred for Stevens. There is no hierophany and, to be sure, no theophany. The mind and the world confront each other as surface; the mind to rise above the world, must leave the plain reality of the world behind it. When the mind (or the imagination; Stevens saw the imagination as the sum of human faculties) stays in this world, all becomes one with the pale world: "In the end, in the whole psychology, the self,/The town, the weather, in a casual litter,/Together, said words of the world are the life of the world" ("An Ordinary Evening").

A poet like Theodore Roethke (died 1963) labored valiantly to sense the presence of God in, through, and beyond the poetic experience of this world. Roethke had no doubt about the possibility of this task. Roethke's poetry, unlike that of Stevens, accepted the possibility of hierophany. Roethke's eye could rest on the limited, on the ordinary thing while, at the same time, seeing in that limited thing, the unlimited which broke out of ordinary experience: "All finite things reveal infinitude:/The mountain with its singular bright shade/Like the blue shine on freshly frozen snow,/The after light upon ice-burdened pines" ("The Far Field" from the *North American Sequence*).

Roethke's most complete statement of this sense of "reality beyond reality" is in the series of poems that make up the *Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical*. Roethke himself once described the sequence as a "hunt, a drive towards God; an effort to break through the barrier of rational experience." It was in that sequence that Roethke makes his final statement on the possibility of transcendent experience as one confronts the world. Roethke did not conceive of the task as an easy one but he believed it was both possible and beatific "when opposites come suddenly into place,/I teach my eyes to hear, my ears to see/how body from spirit slowly does unwind/Until we are pure spirit in the end" ("Infirmity").

To compare the poetry of Roethke and Stevens is not meant to be invidious. These two poets reflect quite different perceptions of reality; they exhibit quite diverse sensibilities. Their differences also reflect a parallel diversity in contemporary theology. Stevens, by such a comparison, does not become "less" religious or, even, unreligious. The poetic vision of Wallace Stevens reflects a deep-felt sentiment that is common in the modern experience, an experience that goes back at least as far as Frederick Nietzsche. This sense of alienation from a grace-ful world has been articulated by writers as prominent (and diverse) as Franz Kafka, Albert Camus and Simone Weil. It is not a sentiment that can be brushed aside as nihilistic pessimism. Those who have most lucidly faced the estrangement of the self and the world exhibit, more often than not,

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what Jean Paul Sartre has called a "stern optimism." There is a sense (or, at minimum, a desire) of union in Roethke; contrariwise, aloneness in Stevens. Stevens accepted that chasm between self and the world but labored all of his poetic life to bridge it. That was his self-appointed poetic task. It is a noble undertaking. What Stevens once wrote of his old Harvard mentor, George Santayana, can justly be applied to Stevens himself: "Total grandeur of a total edifice,/Chosen by an inquisitor of structures/For Himself. He stops upon this threshold,/As if the design of all his words takes form/And frame from thinking and is realized" ("To An Old Philosopher in Rome").

THE FATHER OF STUDS

JAMES T. FARRELL, R.I.P.

JAMES T. FARRELL had endurance. His rise to literary prominence was not meteoric, nor when he achieved it was it secure. But in the course of his decidedly uneven career he was sustained by faith in his own talent, a vision of what he wanted to achieve and energy to pursue it. Even when he was dismissed or condescended to by critics who asserted his best work was far behind him, he continued to add book after book to what was already an imposing list. He had several novels projected when he died this year at the age of seventy-five. An impressive writer.

Like most readers of Farrell, I encountered, first of all, *Studs Lonigan*. The first volume of this trilogy sold less than six hundred copies when it was published in 1932. The second and third volumes sold better, but not impressively. But they did establish Farrell. His talents were widely recognized and praised—except in Catholic journals. (When Farrell wrote, the impulse to criticize Catholicism by Catholics or former Catholics did not find the ready audience that exists today.) Farrell turned fiercely against the cultural poverty and degradation in which he was raised among the hardworking lower-class Irish Catholics of the South Side of Chicago. The passion that he brings to his depiction of people whose lives are fed on sentimental and superstitious religion, copy-book moralisms, tough-guy myths, on frustration, despair and drink—this passion pervades the novel. It is this which allows him to render with honesty and seriousness these people and the life in which they move.

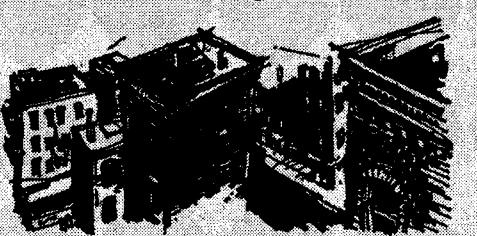
But this was not my reaction when I first read *Studs*. I was in college and preferred Hemingway and Fitzgerald, Jane Austen and James. *Studs* was distinctly not my cup of tea. When I met James Farrell in New York in later years, I'm sure I thought it was good of me to ask him what he was working on then and keep my superior judgment on his earlier novels to myself. And gradually I came to like the person, James Farrell. For his openness, his directness and, still later, for his response to my editing of some pieces he wrote for *Commonweal*.

But I cannot claim close friendship, and years passed when I saw him not at all. However, when I was in Ireland earlier this year, I talked about Farrell with his friend William Shannon, now our Ambassador to Ireland. The impulse to look back to one's ancestors, to dig around for one's roots, apparently strong in many people, was absent from my being. Or so I thought. Seeing for the first time the land from which my parents came, young and poor, I felt that impulse stir within me. It was quickened by Shannon's comments, drawn from his own deep historical knowledge of the Irish and the Irish-Americans. It was natural there to compare and contrast our own backgrounds and Farrell's. Shannon urged me, when I returned to the States, to renew my acquaintance with Farrell. I truly determined to do so. But before I did, I learned of his death. The strength of the personal loss I felt surprised me. Farrell had touched me deeper than I knew.

Since then I have gone back to *Studs Lonigan*. I can appreciate it now as I could not decades ago when I first read it. The opening paragraph still surprises:

> Studs Lonigan, on the verge of fifteen, and wearing his first suit of long trousers, stood in the bathroom with a Sweet Caporal pasted in his mug. His hands were jammed in his trouser pockets, and he sneered. He puffed, drew the fag out of his mouth, inhaled and said to himself:
>
> Well I'm kissin' the old dump goodbye tonight.

That tone, that diction, so new in the thirties when it first appeared, is sustained throughout the saga of Studs's slow rush to judgment. With this trilogy and the Danny O'Neil series that followed, Farrell captured a portion of Irish-



American urban life at the beginning of this century. It is a life that is in the background of many American Irish; it is a part of their roots without some knowledge of which they cannot fully be understood or understand themselves. It is solid and it endures. Much that he wrote after these novels has undeniable merit, but it is probably these works that will finally determine James Farrell's position among American writers. That place is not yet precisely defined, but it is secure.

JAMES FINN

(James Finn, an editor at Commonweal *between 1955 and 1961, is the Editor of* Worldwide *magazine.)*

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INGMAR BERGMAN CROSSED WITH CHARLIE CHAPLIN?

What Iris Murdoch doesn't know

SALLY CUNNEEN

RECENT ADS for Viking Press feature grafitti of a heart pierced by an arrow; above it is the hand-scrawled legend, "Iris Murdoch thinks." It is comforting to know that her publisher accepts this truth, which is not always helpful to a writer's popular appeal. Nonetheless, what gives the recent novels of this English philosopher-novelist their special flavor is Murdoch's use of her intellect to emphasize its limits, to suggest that what is most important is beyond the intellect's grasp.

The Sea, the Sea (Viking, $10.95, 512 pp.) published last year and her nineteenth novel, is representative of these late works in its fusion of moral vision and literary form. The central character, the famous London theater director Charles Arrowby, now in his sixties, has impulsively retired to a house by the northern sea to "abjure magic" and to meditate; he can "honestly say that I have nothing else to do but learn to be good."

His plans are overwhelmed, however, by a chance meeting with Hartley, the ideal love-of-his-life, who had disappeared in late adolescence and married another man. Charles becomes obsessed with rescuing her from this obviously miserable marriage. This self-styled Prospero cannot put aside his wand and begins to stage a "real-life" drama in which he manipulates friends, ex-mistresses, hangers-on, Hartley and even her son Titus, who might have offered him a more realistic opportunity to exercise his good intentions.

Although almost all of this long novel is mediated through Charles's consciousness, his vaguely sinister house with its windowless inner rooms reflects his lack of self-understanding. His continuous (and delightful) absorption in food reveals the true state of his development. Compensating for the pleasures his mother had denied him as a child, Charles has developed not only a gourmet taste but an eye for the changing colors of the rocks and the moody sea that lie just outside his door. Ironically, he is so seized by the intensity of his belief in his perfect love that even Hartley's dowdy appearance and the flowered carpets, the dogs, the sheer tastelessness of her house—called Nibletts!—do not shake him.

A crucial dialogue with his cousin James provides a necessary clue to the fantastic distortions in Charles's observations, which are responsible for many of the surprising complications and much of the astringent humor of this intricate pseudo-memoir. A serious initiate in Tibetan asceticism, James knows he is soon to die, and tries to tell Charles indirectly—through a discussion about religion—that he has been deluding himself in trying to force Hartley to freedom, that the real-life, bedraggled housewife, struggling to preserve her marriage despite its pain and imperfection, has nothing to do with Charles's fantasy of ideal love.

"Religion is power, it has to be," James observes, "the power for instance to change oneself, even to destroy oneself." Charles protests: "I thought religious people felt weak and worshipped something strong."

"That's what they think," replies James. "The worshipper endows the worshipped object with power, real power not imaginary power, that is the sense of the ontological proof, one of the most ambiguous ideas clever men ever thought of. But this power is dreadful stuff. . . . Demons used for good can hang around and make mischief afterwards. The last achievement is the absolute surrender of magic itself, the end of what you call superstition. Yet how does it happen? Goodness is giving up power and acting upon the world negatively. The good is unimaginable."

After the violence and the death of Titus, for which he is partly responsible, Charles is momentarily cleansed and renewed in this reconciliation with his wealthy cousin whom he has always resented. Yet shortly after, back in the dead James's flat in London and surrounded by statues of Budddhas and a box said to contain a demon, Charles proves the truth of his cousin's words. At the novel's wry conclusion, he is about to resume the pursuit of pleasure with an obnoxious adolescent. The demon-casket falls on the floor and opens.

Although James does not stand for Murdoch, his last talk with Charles does suggest the poles of her thought. As she argued brilliantly in *The Sovereignty of Good* (1971), good exists, yet we cannot trust our intellects to perceive it, so deluded are we by our desires. Fair enough for a moralist and a mystic, but what kind of novels could faithfulness to such seemingly contradictory and negative beliefs produce? Oddly enough, just the comic inventions to which her creative talent drew her from the first. Her constant concern in the early novels, in which she tried on genres like borrowed clothes,

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was to trip up her self-centered heroes so that they might take a fresh and humbled look at the variety of things and people around them. Except in *The Bell*, however, a remarkable probe into the failure of an idealistic lay religious commune, she seemed unable to place her characters and symbols into a plot and setting sufficiently naturalistic to suit her own idea of the novel as a form that should suggest the shapelessness of life.

Beginning with *The Nice and the Good* (1968) Murdoch showed a true mastery of her medium. She was able to evolve her own kind of novel while turning to a new emphasis on love as her central subject. Most of these late novels deal primarily with the middle-aged: old enough to have past relations that need reclaiming, not so old that they cannot repeat their mistakes again and again, each time purging their affections a little more. What her characters do not know about their own most intimate attachments is the very stuff of this late fiction—and is often revealed in their emotional response to real neighborhoods and landmarks which, in their imagination, echo Greek, Christian and Eastern myths. Her contemporary London becomes a realistic world through which her painter's eye and playwright's ear depict the collision of characters who are both believable individuals and a cross-section of human society in their differing personalities, age groups and degrees of moral insight. In *A Word Child* the central figure is Hilary Burde, a lower-class scholar with a chip on his shoulder that leads him through repeated acts of envy and violence until his demons are exorcised. His compulsive behavior is brilliantly symbolized by the Inner Circle Line of the Underground he loves to ride. In *The Black Prince* the narrator is the aging bureaucrat and would-be artist Bradley Pearson, ready to write his great work if people, especially women, would stop pursuing him. His real state of arrested interpersonal development is aptly conveyed through his cozy womb-like flat and the excitement with which he continually views the upward thrust of the metallic Post Office Tower.

MURDOCH'S greatest achievements, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) and *The Black Prince* (1973), are also the most outrageous in mingling usually opposed elements: comedy and tragedy, good and evil. Even the narrators seem unlikely, not necessarily because they are so often men. Murdoch has said she uses male narrators because she is dealing with the human condition which "still seems to belong more to a man than a woman." (She herself finds little difference between them and we can see this in the androgynous names and traits assigned to many of her characters.) But the fussy, unloving personality of a Bradley Pearson and his views on art are the very opposite of hers. He mocks his friend Arnold's one-novel-a-year production in much the way critics have chastised her. Yet she can inhabit his imagination so convincingly that his view of events dominates the book. He casts doubt in our eyes like the specks of paper, flakes of paint and ghostly images Murdoch scatters throughout *The Black Prince* to hint what he is up to. Misled by his cleverness, we ignore his neurosis and miss the trap of the plot until it has snapped shut.

This comic Dante falls madly for young Julian, the daughter of his best friend Arnold (whom he envies) and Rachel (whose advances he rejects). His ecstatic state in love provides one of the funniest courtships on record, yet the consummation of this strange affair at a secluded seaside cottage involves the death of Bradley's pathetic sister Priscilla and leads to his permanent separation from Julian. Falsely accused of the murder of Arnold by the vengeful Rachel, Bradley accepts the situation without contest, and through his sacrifice is at last enabled to write his book.

Real pain and wild humor coexist in *The Black Prince*. The bitter, believable complaints of older wives about the misery of their marriages make an exceedingly comic chorus throughout. Even in his enlightened state, the comic hero Pearson suffers. As he says to the "dear friend" he meets in prison:

> "All things work together for good for those who love God," said St. Paul. Possibly; but what is it to love God? I have never seen this happening. There is, my dear friend and mentor, some hard-won calm when we see the world very detailed and very close: as close and vivid as the newly painted funnels of ships on a sunny evening. But the dark and the ugly is not washed away, this too is seen, and the horror of the world is part of the world.

A Fairly Honourable Defeat is just as dark but different in method, using multiple viewpoints and dramatic techniques to reveal the sources of good and evil in the relations among its nine characters. The limitations of their private loves and imaginations have clear social consequences quite unrelated to their good intentions. Just as Charles enacted a manipulative drama in *The Sea, The Sea*, here the charismatic scientist Julius King creates an experiment to prove that he can "divide anybody from anybody," that no human relationship is permanent and no serious harm is done in breaking people apart.

He is proved only partly right. Rupert, writing a book on the good but unable to love his own son, succumbs and is destroyed. Morgan, leaving her husband Tallis to seek "freedom," "identity" and Julius, is severely shaken. But the homosexual couple Simon and Axel are strengthened in their love and made alert to the sources of evil in themselves. Tallis is the other figure unaffected by Julius's machinations. Already deeply afflicted by his sister's rape, his wife's desertion and his father's terminal illness, he refuses to judge anybody. He is the only character Julius respects but is also unable to help. Julius is successful at the end, but he is alone and always will be. Tallis is a failure; but he is the only one to understand and suffer from the depths of evil in the world and still love the others in it without sentimentality or illusion.

Well written, yes. But isn't there something unseemly in filling with so much humor a book that depicts the triumph of evil? Can we tolerate the vision of an Ingmar Bergman crossed with that of Charlie Chaplin? For it can't be denied that Tallis's aged father's bitter diatribes against life, the Welfare State and his longsuffering son are wickedly funny. So is the dialogue between Hilda and her son Peter, two individuals who cannot communicate honestly despite their intense love and suffering. Yet comic vision is precisely what enables Murdoch to be so accurate about her characters' condition. And the sophisti-

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cated mode she adopts in these late novels exploits this mimetic accuracy in order to prod the reader to her ironic attitude towards the human failings captured in them.

What Iris Murdoch knows she transmutes into comic art so that we should not exaggerate our own importance either for good or evil. What she doesn't know her novels point to indirectly: the rich human possibilities of our world seen in the light of the good that shines in the most pessimistic of her novels.

Screen

FESTIVAL FOIBLES

GENEROSITY IN FILMS

THERE ARE THREE kinds of movies—good, bad, or indifferent—and one way to tell them apart is to look for the sort of scene that occurs about half way through Christian de Chalonge's *Other People's Money*. In this scene the hero, who is in the midst of a grave personal crisis, is waiting on a train platform. Nearby is an old couple. The man has something in his eye, and his wife is trying to get it out. She pecks him on the cheek to calm him. They don't notice the hero, but he notices them and approaches anxiously as if he's going to speak to them. Uncertain, he hesitates. As the scene ends, he has drifted off down the platform, but still can't take his eyes off them. If a movie has a scene like this, it's good. If it doesn't, it's indifferent. And if it has this scene followed shortly by another in which the hero explains what the first scene *meant*, it's a bad movie. This is the kind of movie that *Other People's Money* is, the kind that can't stand to leave life a bit ambiguous, the way it really is.

Left alone, the scene is pleasing because it is indefinite. Why is the hero drawn to these people? Does he want to tell them his troubles? Does he want to help them with theirs? Or does he see in them some image of himself? The scene has a little magic to it. It defies the laws of gravity, tossing three or four possibilities into the air and just leaving them there. The hurry de Chalonge is in to eliminate all the possibilities except one is almost insulting. Uncomfortable with the variousness and uncertainty in life, he wants to deprive us of them too. He doesn't trust us with them. Worse, he doesn't trust human experience.

Other People's Money often lacks generosity in this way. A mild thriller about a bank executive named Rainier (Jean-Louis Trintignant) who is being made the fall guy in a financial scandal, the film begins with some surreal touches. Shots of Rainier sitting in a bright, modern waiting room are intercut with a dim scene where the bank's board fires him by candlelight, as if in a fraternity ritual. But de Chalonge is afraid someone might take this whimsical treatment for a loose end, so he soon has Rainier explain it away like the incident on

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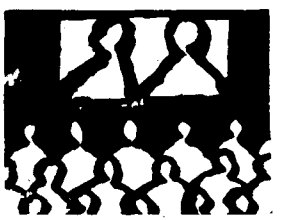
the train platform. ("I remember," he muses later, "I was fired on the day of the blackout.") Such stylization is just a little something to get the film started, to break the ice. *Other People's Money* is like a business appointment with someone who is effusive and gracious and full of amenities when we enter his office, but after a few minutes wipes the smile from his face and says, "OK, what do you want?" De Chalonge quickly gets down to the business of sorting out the plot's myriad details as a civilian *policier*, a mere story of intrigue. Preoccupied by this job of exposition, he has no more time to waste on style or character.

By the end of *Other People's Money*, the only mystery left is why this film deserved to be shown at the New York Film Festival. Every month I am sent a magazine called *Cinéma*



Français which gives a run-down on all the major films in production in France. There are probably a dozen nondescript tales of intrigue like *Other People's Money* made there every year. And almost every year the Festival seems to include an example of this second-rate genre—last year's was Michel Deville's *Dossier 51*—among the two dozen films that are supposed to represent the whole world's achievement in movies. I wonder at times whether films don't get into the Festival on the basis of someone's having caught the first twenty minutes of them. Up to that point *Other People's Money* seems artsy enough for the Festival, and to have the right sort of liberal politics.

The other thing it has going for it is that despite its mediocrity—or, more likely, because of it—the film won some prizes in France similar to our Academy Awards. The Festival's worst vice has always been its desire to attract big commercial films of the sort that don't really need a festival to be seen. At times it has shown such American schlock that the only reason imaginable was its eagerness to show itself loyal to Hollywood—to impress the studio bosses the way flunkies do, by being ready to endure any indignity in the hope it will bring you preferential treatment. Showing an anthology film of Bugs Bunny-Road Runner cartoons, as the Festival did this year, seems to me this kind of behavior, and showing *Other People's Money* suggests that the Festival is trying to curry the favor of the industry in France the same way.

A HUNGARIAN FILM called *Angi Vera*, which was also shown at the Festival, ends with a scene very like that on the railroad platform in *Other People's Money*. But since it is the last scene, we can enjoy even as we watch it that no one is going to explain it away afterwards. Vera (Veronika Papp), who has just completed the 1948 session at a special training school to which only the most promising young Communists are sent, is leaving by car with her friend and mentor Anna (Erzi Pastor). As the car drives across the wintry landscape, it

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passes a woman puffing along on a bicycle. "Oh, look! It's . . ." Vera says, naming a comrade from the school. But Anna is dozing and doesn't hear. Vera taps on the side window and calls out as the car pulls past the cyclist, but she doesn't hear either. As the film ends Vera twists around in her seat to peer out the rear window at the receding figure on the bike, who remains unaware of being observed.

What makes this scene so like the one in *Other People's Money* is not just the situation where one person watches another, but the atmosphere of the scene. Vera has been the outstanding student at the school. That she is leaving by car indicates she is going on to greater things. But what has made her outstanding, ironically, is her reluctance. Rather than ideological fervor, it was having the temerity to complain about conditions where she worked that caused her to be chosen for the school. Anna is a staunch hardliner who at one point makes Vera aid her in denouncing a malcontent, but Vera is clearly unhappy with her part in the act.

Even when she is the only one escaping abuse during a session of public criticism, Vera cannot accept her role as the people's heroine. She gets up and confesses a love affair with her teacher, to the embarrassment of the officials who have just been extolling her virtues. She has been so torn between personal emotions and political commitments, so conflicted about her experiences at the school, that she faints at the commencement exercises. As she passes the comrade on the bicycle now, what can she be thinking? Sitting between the cyclist and the dozing Anna, neither of whom answers when she calls out to them, Vera is alone. None of the conflicts the film has revealed is resolved. That's the whole point of this exquisite little scene with which the film ends.

A film like this sticks a pin into the inflated melodramas we are used to seeing at commercial movie houses and even, too often, at the Festival. Last time I was talking about Stanley Kramer's *The Runner Stumbles*, a film on which *Angi Vera* offers a damning commentary. The trouble with Kramer's film about a priest accused of murdering a nun with whom he was in love is that it only takes lovers seriously. It does what comes easily to movies—boy meets girl—but gives no equivalent reality to religion. In *Angi Vera*, director Pal Gabor does better by Communism than Kramer does by Catholicism. *The Runner Stumbles* was not shown at the Festival, but the films that were were sometimes too like it. Having a festival only makes sense if it offers us a rare opportunity to see movies—an opportunity to see exceptional movies, like *Angi Vera*, that we would not otherwise get a chance to see at all.

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The uses of adversity

SAUL MALOFF

THE BUZZ-VALUE of Philip Roth's new novel,* for readers enamored of such things, can be disposed of handily, without mystification or disingenuousness: E.I. Lonoff, the illustrious Jewish short-story writer, strongly suggests Bernard Malamud; and Felix Abravanel, the other celebrated writer, as strongly suggests Saul Bellow, Roth, in a recent interview, angrily denied this, denouncing the New York literary scene as gossip-ridden (as of course it is) and pointing out triumphantly that he equipped the latter with his own physical attributes—a strange, far-too-simple argument, and the most transparent of disguises; but he was betrayed by his own great virtues as a writer—an eery gift for mimicry and an exhilarating acuity of eye and ear, together with an extraordinary literary intelligence, so that certain distinguishing qualities of the older writers' work are fixed to the wall with the highest precision; and it may be fairly added that though *The Ghost Writer* is not in any literal sense a roman à clef, certain personal traits are unmistakably caught—not in full portrait, of course, but in broad strokes, a gesture here, a tone of voice there, a turn of mind everywhere. While Lonoff is a major character, and a constant presence in the novel's action and atmosphere, Abravanel is seen, or recollected, in passing, held just long enough to register some salient characteristics, and serves (here the resemblance to Bellow breaks down and is replaced by Mailer, if anyone) as a negative example for a young writer at the beginning of a greatly promising career.

Nathan Zuckerman—the Roth-character, let's call him, and never mind classroom rubbish about the "biographical fallacy," that tiresome old goblin of the New Criticism—is the young writer, the narrator and central figure, 23-years-old and the author of a few stories published to critical acclaim, one of which has created a major scandal back home and is the occasion of his quest for vindication, for moral and literary support from E.I. Lonoff, the Jewish-American writer whom he most venerates and who has lived, over the years, isolated from literary (and any other) society in his Berkshire fastness, gone on writing his marvelous, burnished stories, indifferent to fashion, money, fame, aloof from and contemptuous of the great world, remote from his own family, unmoved by the public acclaim which was so slow in arriving: a life, in short, as secluded and austere in its devotion to his vocation as Abravanel's is gilded and worldly. These are the choices presented to Nathan; in making his pilgrimage to the Lanoff shrine he has already made his choice. But what does it entail: what deprivations, denials, exactions? How is one to live and serve one's talent purely and uncompromisingly in a world which has its own and very different ideas of what is important and valuable?

In Nathan's case, as, notoriously, in the young Roth's, the early work, instead of bringing him the world's love and admiration, as he confidently expected, brings him great grief and pain. The world, in the persons of his doting parents, relatives, neighbors, is not much interested in a fully achieved work of fiction which announces the arrival of a formidably gifted new writer. Fine and dandy as far as it goes; but in the first place Newark wants to know: Is it good or bad for the Jews? What does it do for the remnant of the holocaust? What will the neighbors say, and what will the goyim think? The offending story rattles with family skeletons: an ambitious, domineering Jewish mother; a con-man and crook; slobs. Newark is shocked, outraged, heartbroken: all the while they have been harboring a boy who's no better than an anti-Semite, who is indeed far worse, a viper but *their* viper. For his part, Nathan is gravely wounded and implacably furious, in roughly equal measure. Don't they see what he's done for them? Raised them out of obscurity and put them on the map; justified their faith in him—they had always known the boy had everything—by becoming an *artist*? Nathan has come out of the University of Chicago afire with the glad tidings of Art, and he its messsenger. A straight-A student, he knows all the right literary responses, none of the human ones. In a superbly staged and greatly moving scene, he tries to explain all this to his loving father, a good and decent man; but the grieving man somehow doesn't seem to get the point. Look! Look what you have done, my son, to your own people. You've broken your mother's heart.

Lonoff, who has been there before, again and again and again, seeks to reassure him. The Master himself tells him not to worry, these things are to be expected; he's a true writer and he must go on till he gets there—that must be his only concern. The Master's voice fills Nathan with joy—ah, to be sitting in the temple talking with its high priest about the writer's vocation, about Literature, while he himself is working on his first novel: that's happiness. To be told by Lonoff that in its bloody contest with Life, Art must prevail. All the same, he can't quite shake off his parents' misery, the nervous sense that perhaps he has not made them a fully adequate response to their baffled grief.

Along with his wife, Lonoff's house is for the time occupied by Amy Bellette, a onetime student and now a friend of Lonoff's, come down from Cambridge ostensibly to bring order to the chaos of his "papers." An ambiguous figure from the outset, she comes to seem even more mysterious to the enthralled Nathan. Hope Lonoff is at the boiling point,

*_The Ghost Writer_, by Philip Roth, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 180 pp. $8.95.

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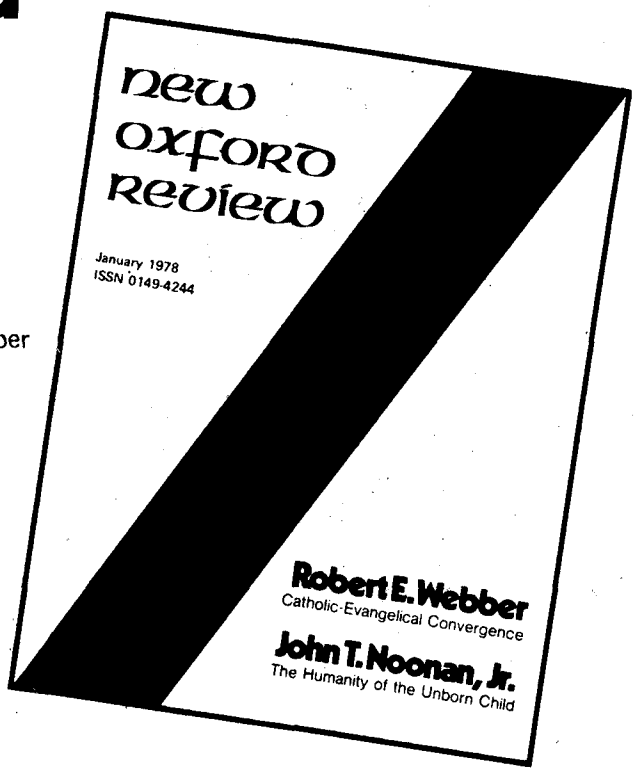

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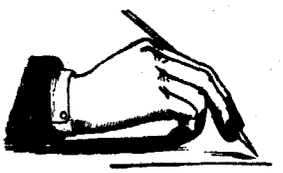
threatening to leave forever, clearing the way for the adoring Amy; Lonoff is sore-tried. Beautiful but oddly out of focus, a European refugee of some sort, Amy eludes definition. A kind of daughter? a former, or current, lover? merely a friend of the family? Nathan is perplexed, and all the more dazzled. In a wonderfully executed set-piece of a scene that curiously echoes a scene in Malamud's recent *Dubin's Lives*, some of the strands mesh. Lodging for the night in Lonoff's study, where he is attempting painfully, and unavailingly, to write out for their edification a definitive reply to his parents' protests, Nathan overhears a strange scene, enacted in the bedroom directly above his desk, between Lonoff and Amy. Just beyond Nathan's fingertips as he stands on a volume of Henry James's stories atop the desk, Amy pleads for Lonoff's love and is told to behave herself like a good girl; rebuffed but persistent, she offers him her fair breast as a token of her esteem, and is again denied, kindly but firmly, by this man who understands the nature of limits; and so the fatherless child cuddles up in her Daddy's lap and begs him to comfort her with his celebrated imitation of the great Jimmy Durante. Lonoff obliges, thus contriving to be both a lover and chaste: a father-of-sorts. Not such cold comfort as it may seem at first glance.

Certainly not to Nathan. Ablaze body and soul, his imagination ignites. Who is this Amy Bellette? Who is she really? Just as once Roth resurrected Franz Kafka and brought him back alive to Newark, so now he revives a heroic figure more to Newark's taste. Looked at closely, with an eye that penetrates the surface of things to their veriest essence, could Amy not be . . . why of course she can be, in fact doubtless is, none other than Anne Frank. Anne Frank Herself! How can anyone not see it is she? In a splendid exercise of the fiction-making faculty Nathan conjures up a plausible Anne Frank, the woman the girl became after her supposed death, equipped with a history, a personality, a future, quirks, a voice, motives, oddities, the lot, all that is necessary to have come finally to this house and this predicament. And what if Nathan, already enchanted, captures her for himself, becoming in a single stroke Lonoff's son and the source of immeasurable pride and pleasure to his bereaved parents and the other unbelievers back home in Newark? Let them then dare to question his loyalty, love, good-will. Now perhaps they will begin to understand, where all else failed, the uses of the imagination and the divine



power of art to bestow life. The resurrected saint is Nathan's gift to his father. What a gift! What a trophy! What a daughter-in-law to bring home! "Oh," his father will say, "how I have misunderstood my son. How mistaken we have been!" *The Ghost Writer* is a kind of peace offering, Roth's own, I believe it fair to say, a filial gesture for wounds unintentionally administered, for art's sake.

Even to Judge Wapter, Roth's worst-case possibility and most horrible example. Wapter is the Newark Jewish community's most distinguished figure, God help it, a power to reckon with, a puffed-up little martinet married to a rich woman who got in him no better than she deserved, the crassest sort of philistine oozing sanctity and complacency. Solemnly enthroned in his chambers he sports beneath his ceremonial robes argyle socks! That noted, what more need be said of him? In his anguish over his son's story, Nathan's father has gone to Wapter as to a court of final appeal to implore him to intercede with his errant son before it's too late for him and for the Jews; gone to him as his forebears in the Old Country might have journeyed across the Pale to seek divine wisdom at the rabbinical court of the holiest sage. Judge Wapter, assisted by his wife, the regional expert on such things as literature and art, rises superbly to the occasion. In a letter and document almost too perfect to have been invented—starting with *Goodbye, Columbus* and the early stories (to say nothing of *Portnoy's Complaint*) Roth must have received trunkloads of such mail, all of it of course intended for his own good: Wapter's seems the quintessence of them, a case of art improving on life—Wapter unctuously, more in sorrow than in anger, lectures the stripling on the "responsibilities" of his high calling, charging him in the gentlest of murmuring tones with high treason against God and man.

The attached document, which is some sort of masterpiece, is a questionnaire—an actual questionnaire headed "Ten Questions for Nathan Zuckerman"— prepared jointly by the Wapters in order to bring to Nathan's attention certain matters that might otherwise have eluded him, by way of easing him into examining his conscience to its rottenest depths. A few morsels may suggest the banquet: "If you had been living in Nazi Germany in the thirties, would you have written such a story?. . . ."Do you believe Shakespeare's Shylock and Dickens's Fagin have been of no use to anti-Semites?" . . . "Do you practice Judaism? If so, how? If not, what credentials qualify you for writing about Jewish life for national magazines?". . . ."In a story with a Jewish background, what reason is there for a description of physical intimacy between a married Jewish man and an unmarried Christian woman? Why in a story with a Jewish background must there be (a) adultery; (b) incessant fighting over money; (c) warped human behavior in general?". . . ."Aside from financial gain to yourself, what benefits do you think publishing this story in a national magazine will have for (a) your family; (b) your community; (c) the Jewish religion; (d) the well-being of the Jewish people?". . . ."Can you honestly say that there is anything in your short story that would not warm the heart of a Julius Streicher or a Joseph Goebbels?"

Clearly, the man is a crude joke, a pompous ass and petty tyrant; and a blind man standing off at a great distance can see him for what he is, his execrable wife for what she is: stock figures of knowing farce. The worst possible case, put by the

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worst possible advocate. We've always known what they'll never know: that art is sovereign; that its only responsibility (the word itself is absurd) is to itself, its own laws and truths. Any clever schoolboy knows this. Nathan, raging at the Wapters, tells his frantic, tearful mother that no, he'll see them in hell before replying to them; tells her that Newark is not yet Belsen—in Newark the only violence committed on Jews is at the hands of plastic surgeons specializing in noses; and as for his "father's love," the ultimate weapon invoked by the desperate mother, well, then, so be it: "I am on my own!" he declares.

But not quite: it is not for the deified Lonoff that Nathan creates Anne Frank out of baser materials. Lonoff—not Roth's Lonoff but Nathan's, the character in his Anne Frank fantasies—knows that the girl of Nathan's dream is mad. Nathan needs her as his "unassailable advocate" against Newark's "charges of defection and betrayal and reckless, heinous informing," his "unchallengeable answer to their questionnaire that I proposed to offer the Wapters." But the actual Amy Bellette, indifferent to and rather bored by Nathan, remains stolidly herself and no one else; the Anne Frank he has fashioned, looking back twenty years after the events of the novel, resists all his strenuous efforts to "lift her out of her sacred book and make her a character in this life." In any case, against the Wapters nothing avails: the fiction he has composed as his unchallengeable answer, by desanctifying the "Child Martyr," "would seem to them a desecration even more vile than the one they had read."

So it must be. Short of the lies they solicit, the warm, comforting bedtime stories, there is no way of "answering" the Wapters that will not incur their wrath. And yet, the Wapters must be answered; and with high moral seriousness: trivial and vulgar people, too, feel real pain, run real blood. But nobody ever claimed that art was painless—how is one to broadcast that truism in Newark, or announce that the only truly unpardonable sin is bad art, the gratuitous infliction of pain? For the rest of us *The Ghost Writer* will serve in a cruelly flawed world as the only possible answer: a novel about the nature and risks—and limits—of art and the imagination, about the surprising uses of adversity, as subtle, intricate, serious, finely-turned and deeply felt a fiction as Roth, in full voice, has wrought.

Books: BACKING AWAY FROM ABORTION

ABORTING AMERICA

Bernard N. Nathanson, M.D., with Richard N. Ostling

Doubleday, $10, 320 pp.

Robert G. Hoyt

MOST PEOPLE interested in the abortion debate will have heard of Bernard N. Nathanson. A New York City obstetrician-gynecologist, he took part in 1969 in founding the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL), now the National Abortion Rights Action League. After New York State, partly at NARAL's urging, legalized abortion in 1970, Nathanson served for nineteen months as director of the Center for Reproductive and Sexual Health, which despite its name was "the first—and largest—abortion clinic in the Western world." In a paper he contributed to the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1972, he described with some pride the standards and procedures used by the clinic to establish its record of safe operation.

But then Nathanson resigned from the Center and after a period of reflection submitted another manuscript to the same prestigious publication, published in 1974 as "Deeper into Abortion." In it he acknowledged that he was "deeply troubled by my own increasing certainty that I . . . presided over 60,000 deaths" at the clinic. For some time after this, he writes, he continued to perform abortions, including elective abortions, but with increasing reluctance, and he kept up his reflections. This book is the result of his pondering.

Nathanson's first serious personal encounter with abortion and abortion law occurred in his third year at McGill University Medical College in Montreal, when his partner in a love affair became pregnant. An illegal abortionist was found but the operation was very nearly botched and the trauma of the experience broke up the affair. In internship and residency and later as he became successful in his practice, he learned (too well, he might say now) of the "tragic wastefulness, infuriating injustice and medical hypocrisy" of the abortion problem under proscriptive law. Affluent women, for whom pregnancy might be no more than an inconvenience, could expect cooperation from the profession in the form of cooked lab reports, routine discoveries of psychiatric "indications" or referral to other jurisdictions (Japan, England, Puerto Rico) where abortion law was either permissive or loosely enforced. Poor women who out of desperation induced their own abortions or found a hack abortionist risked disease, sterility and death.

At about the time Nathanson began to believe the laws should be changed, he met Lawrence Lader, a well-off, left-of-center magazine writer and crusader for social justice who had adopted total abolition of abortion laws as his cause. Nathanson describes Lader as a "male chauvinist feminist" and says he was put off by Lader's willingness, for the sake of polemical effectiveness, to cast the Catholic hierarchy as chief villain in the abortion problem. Yet the two became close allies in organizing NARAL and orienting it toward revolutionary rather than moderate change. Another influence, described by Nathanson as "the

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most imprerssive figure of my years in the abortion movement," was Howard Moody, senior minister of Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, a veteran crusader for liberal-to-radical causes and the organizer of the Clergy Consultation [read: Referral] Service on Abortion. Step by step Nathanson became more strongly committed and more deeply engaged, until he became a significant pro-abortion force within medicine and a key figure in NARAL.

Why did he change? Nathanson explains the results of the process, i.e., his new convictions, better than he does the process himself; the reader is able to think with him but not feel with him. Sheer volume may have been a factor; he was medically responsible for some 75,000 abortions, of which he performed 1,500 himself. Another factor appears to have been the infighting among pro-abortionists, the deceptive propaganda, false statistics and dubious arguments (as he now perceives them) used by some in his own camp.

Once doubt entered his mind, he says, he re-weighed some of his past reading (not much of it is cited). He also opened himself to the new data in fetal research and to developments in perinatology, the new specialty devoted to treatment of the fetus. Research findings, many of them admirably described in this book, keep confirming the uniqueness of each "product of conception," and such data are being gathered at earlier and earlier stages. Nathanson predicts new such discoveries as research continues; sure enough, a news story published at about the time his book was being released reported evidence that a pregnant woman's immunological reaction to the presence of a fetus, which would otherwise result in its expulsion, is suppressed by a substance the fetus itself generates; something that wouldn't be necessary if the fetus were merely "part of the woman's body."

From his reflections on such data Nathanson now reasons that the fetus is a member of the human community, deserving of its protection, from the (now observable) moment it signals its presence by implanting itself in the uterus. Even those ethicists who agree with his conclusion may find unbridged chasms in the philosophical path he follows. Nevertheless, so far as I could observe, the argument is made with careful fairness, and it is cumulatively powerful. So also is the author's dissection of the Supreme Court's decisions of 1973 invalidating state abortion laws.

Nathanson is less impressive, at least to me, in discussing what is to be done. The problems rise in his final chapter, "Ought There Be a Law?" Though he distances himself respectfully from the influence of traditional religion and scornfully from the Right to Life movement (which he stereotypes), what he wants is very close to what they want, a restoration of the *status quo ante* 1973. He is sufficiently politically aware to fear the possible consequences of a Constitutional Convention; his hope is for a Supreme Court reversal of the '73 decisions, followed by enactment of state laws forbidding abortion except to prevent the death of the woman or a significant shortening of her life span. Pregnancies resulting from rape, incest, adultery or in which the fetus is known to be defective would not meet his test: "a life for a life." Penalties for violations would be imposed on the woman as well as the doctor and (one gathers) they would be severe.

There is a passage in an essay by Robert Jay Lifton which analyzes conversions of militant Communists into militantly anti-Communist Catholics. What typically occurs in such cases, Lifton says, is not a 100-percent shift in the personality but a one percent change coupled with a 180-degree reversal of direction. The implied comparison with Nathanson is somewhat invidious, since it does not appear from his account that he was ever a true fanatic. It does seem fair to recall that the worst mistake NARAL & Co. made was not their tactical use of slanderous propaganda or even their insistent trivialization of what occurs in the abortion "procedure." What hurt them and society most was, rather, their strategy of going for total victory in the courts, using a dubious constitutional rationale. Both they and the Supreme Court misread public opinion. The decisions stirred up a backlash that threatens not only to overwhelm the pro-abortion movement but to keep putting reactionary single-issue candidates into office, with ethical consequences that Lader, Moody, Nathanson and most readers of *Commonweal* will deplore.

In short, Nathanson may be repeating two of his earlier mistakes. Once more he makes a single-factor analysis of a complicated moral dilemma, and once again he forces the results of opinion polling into a too-simple reading of the public mind. More specifically: If Dr. Nathanson's prescription is followed, what is to prevent a recurrence of the conditions that first drove a younger Dr. Nathanson into the pro-abortion movement? In an earlier chapter he suggests an answer when he reports the availability of do-it-yourself pregnancy tests and abortion methods—for example, the use of prostaglandin vaginal suppositories early in pregnancy to initiate a process that will be indistinguishable from spontaneous abortion, so that the woman can be treated by her doctor without risk for either even if abortion becomes illegal again. But one suspects that such methods will be truly available only to the literate and well-informed, not to the women whose suffering made life difficult for Bernard Nathanson as a resident.

And more basically: In the conditions of this economy and this culture, conditions not likely to change much in this century, some pregnancies that do not threaten health are genuinely catastrophic, and by far the greater share of the burden of catastrophe is borne by women. That is a social reality with ethical consequences that ought to be integrated into moral judgment, not simply overridden. The reality is not canceled out by Nathanson's observation that the underlying social injustice *could* be removed by social reforms; the reforms aren't happening.

Nathanson might reply, logically enough, that the injustice borne by some women is less than the one imposed on an aborted fetus, and that a permissive or neutral official stance encourages the choice of abortion for the flimsiest, most selfish and anti-social reasons. Granting the first point with some reservations and

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agreeing with the second, I suggest that a successful hardline fight to restore restrictive laws will not overcome, will more likely nourish the abortion ethic where it has taken root. Logic does not always suffice. Sound morality and sound law must take account of what people feel and are able to perceive.

This is a compellingly interesting book that will succeed in making any reasonably open-minded reader think hard about what abortion is. That is the essential first step toward making us do what must be done to make abortion never appear necessary. For an *ad hominem* reason, I wish, *per impossibile*, that it had been written by a woman, or by a man less impatient with "emotion." More importantly, I wish its author had contented himself with diagnosis and description of our problem, making us more aware of the life within the womb, and had resisted the temptation to offer a societal remedy.

Too confident in common sense?

THE NUCLEAR QUESTION

Michael Mandelbaum

Cambridge, $16.95, 277 pp.

Thomas Powers

A GREAT MANY lessons can be drawn from the Cuban Missile Crisis, but the one which has received the least attention is the implication we may not know the final crisis has even begun until the first bomb goes off. This is a possibility which runs counter to the history of warfare. The fighting does not generally start bang! just like that. A political crisis usually announces the onset of hostilities. There is time for a run on food stores, wild confusion on the bourses, long analytical articles on why things must go this way or that, kisses goodbye as the soldiers go off to mobilize. War in the modern age is so fearful there is always a ghastly shock when it actually begins, even if its approach has been obvious for years, as it was during the 1930s. But a reasonably diligent reader of the newspaper traditionally had no cause to complain; plenty of evidence was there for those with eyes to see.

But the Cuban Missile Crisis might have gone the other way. The crisis began on October 16, 1962, when the U.S. obtained proof that the Soviets were putting nuclear missiles into Cuba, despite many denials, For six days Kennedy and his advisers debated what to do, and on October 22 the President announced a blockade of Cuba along with other measures. During those six days rumors began to filter through Washington that something was up, but journalists failed to discover what it was and there was certainly nothing like open public alarm. Only a vague uneasiness obtained.

During that period, it will be remembered, Kennedy's advisers met daily to argue possible courses of action. During the first few days the advisers leaned in favor of a "surgical" air strike to destroy the missile sites. Vietnam offered many such examples of surgery. The only thing they had in common with real surgery, was blood. The 20,000 Russians sent to establish, maintain and guard the missiles would have experienced many casualties. Eventually the approach was scrapped because of the danger it would force Khrushchev's hand, and lead to war.

Theodore Sorensen, one of Kennedy's chief aides, described these deliberations at length for the Kennedy Library's oral history. Michael Mandelbaum quotes him in his new book, *The Nuclear Question*: "I will always remember Dean Acheson coming into our meeting and saying that he felt we should knock out Soviet missiles in Cuba by an air strike. Someone asked him, 'If we do that, what do you think the Soviet Union will do?' He said, 'I think I know the Soviet Union well. I know what they are required to do in the light of their history and their posture around the world. I think they will knock out our missiles in Turkey.' And then the question came again, 'Well, what do we do?' 'Well,' he said, 'I believe under our NATO treaty with which I was associated, we would be required to

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respond by knocking out a missile based inside the Soviet Union.' 'Well, then what do they do? 'Well,' he said, 'that's when we hope cooler heads will prevail and they'll stop and talk.''

As it happened, cooler heads prevailed before the first shot was fired, but it might have gone the other way. The United States might have attacked, the USSR might have responded, and the world might have gone to bed at peace, and waked up at war. The lesson, of course, is that what might have happened then, might be happening now. Both sides in the precarious balance of terror have a capacity for lightning strikes, and the rest of us are dependent on cooler heads. Mandelbaum describes this situation as ''the best of all possible nuclear worlds,'' while conceding it is not ''the best of all *imaginable* nuclear worlds.''

Like most professional academics devoted to the study of war and peace in the nuclear age, Mandelbaum reveals an astonishing degree of confidence in the stability of the nuclear status quo. He has studied these things for so long, is so familiar with the technical arcana, and has discussed them with so many men who lived with the details for years, that the prevailing wisdom of the defense community now appears to him as if engraved on granite. War doesn't make sense, only a madman would run serious risk of one, neither side could gain, both sides *know* what would happen. The prevailing wisdom comes down to nothing more substantial than common sense, but it is so common, and so sensible, it is hard to image any turn of events which would push the world over the brink.

The professional literature on this subject is vast. Mandelbaum's book is distinguished by its brevity, its clarity of analysis, and its focus on the history of how we got from there to here. As early as 1946 the military analyst Bernard Brodie grasped what Mandelbaum still takes to be the basic truth concerning the Bomb: ''Everything about it is overshadowed by the twin facts that it exists and that its power is fantastically great.'' Beyond that, in Mandelbaum's view, we cannot go; he quotes the sentence at least half a dozen times, and his history of the many futile attempts to find a way to use the bomb demonstrates what was implicit at Hiroshima—that it's safe to drop only on people who haven't got one.

Mandelbaum's history is brief because the strategists have never managed to get very far from the great fact of the Bomb's destructiveness. Its only possible utility is to frighten off opponents. The policy of both Truman and Eisenhower was to build enough of them so the Russians would never dare to launch any sort of attack which might trigger a nuclear response. Kennedy went one step beyond the bomb's deterrent value after recognizing that the Russians were eventually bound to reach the stage where they could do to us, what we could do to them. That put the strategic emphasis on the bomb's survivability. If it were vulnerable to surprise attack it would cease to deter; hence the importance of launch systems so ''hard,'' like the concrete Minuteman silos, or so elusive, like nuclear submarines, there would always be bombs and missiles enough in reserve to devastate an attacker. This strategic concept is as valid now as it was fifteen years ago; the debate over SALT II comes down to an argument over the Russian threat to the Minuteman, which will soon be vulnerable to increasingly accurate Soviet missiles. One faction says this fact will invite attack, unless we build a new, less vulnerable system. Another faction says U.S. submarines and planes would still threaten sufficient destruction of the Soviet Union to override any minor advantage to be gained by taking out Minuteman. The point, in Mandelbaum's view, is that the argument is still about deterrence: not how to win nuclear wars, but how to avoid them. So long as that is the case, he suggests, the nuclear peace will be maintained.

Mandelbaum has a great deal that is interesting to say, especially about the success of diplomatic efforts to control weaponry once the United States abandoned visionary attempts to negotiate multinational agreements which would do away with arms and war altogether. He may even be right that this is the best of all *possible* nuclear worlds; that sounds like a cause for gloom to me, but its pessimism doesn't make it untrue. But I can't help wondering if Mandelbaum's confidence in the system's stability is misplaced. What that confidence comes down to is the observation that deterrence has worked so far, which might have been said equally well of the balance of power which maintained the peace of Europe for so long after the Franco-Prussian War—43 years— until 1914.

Popularizing the past

THE GNOSTIC GOSPELS
Elaine H. Pagels
Random, $10, 203 pp.

Pheme Perkins

Whenever discoveries of ancient manuscripts hit the media, orthodox Christians hope that their traditional positions will be confirmed; their critics, that revolt will be legitimated. Extravagant claims from both sides often stick in the popular imagination long after both sides have settled down to the sober task of understanding a religious phenomenon neither so orthodox nor so revolutionary as its original enthusiasts would have us believe. When they emerge into view in the second century, the gnostics are a religiously varied lot. Like many esoteric movements they feel that they have contacted the deeper truth of the ''Judeo-Christian tradition.'' The god of the Old Testament—as well as pagan deities and ''the divine'' of philosophers—is not the transcendent source of divine being which constitutes the source, essence, and goal of humanity. He is a false, arrogant offspring of a heavenly figure, usually the female Wisdom, who fell away from the perfection and praise of the transcendent God. Most of the cosmos that we know is a carefully constructed plot to keep humanity from awakening to its true divine home. We would know nothing of that other reality had a revealer from that world—usually, the revealer is Christ—not come to call us to our true destiny beyond this cosmos; its powers and gods. Christian gnostics interpreted Christian traditions and sacra-

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ments along the lines of this perception of reality. They claimed that other Christians, who still worshipped the god of the Old Testament, had not attained to the spiritual truth of their religion.

A whole "library" of gnostic religious writings was discovered in Egypt over thirty years ago. A provisional English translation of the whole was published almost two years ago (J.M. Robinson ed. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Harper & Row, 1977), but never caught the media in the way that the Dead Sea Scrolls did, and those of us working on these new materials have been spared the plague of hasty and inaccurate generalization. Unfortunately, Prof. Pagels' attempt to bring these materials into the popular consciousness, while not the plague, will certainly produce a bad case of flu. This book exaggerates the weaknesses of several of her scholarly articles, which it popularizes. Pagels either knows or cares too little about the theological diversity and development of "orthodox" Christian theology in the first three centuries to be fair to its defenders in their debates with the gnostics. She is frequently taken in by the stock rhetorical polemics of both sides, mistaking rhetoric for fact. Finally, she imposes a modernizing psychology of creative, autonomous, individual artistry on an ancient consciousness, which was far from that stage, in order to exhibit the gnostics as champions of the creative individual over against the orthodox. Though she points to Jung as appreciating the psychological profundity of gnosis, she apparently has paid little attention to what he says on the subject. He explicitly differentiates between the psychological need of ancient gnostics to emerge into consciousness of a spiritual realm and the psychological need of moderns to find reconciling and balancing symbols of male/female; material/spiritual. He also points to many instances in which the orthodox Christian symbols are a more adequate expression of psychological wholeness than those of the gnostics.

Over the years, Prof. Pagels has contributed much to our understanding of gnosticism, and there is much in this book that is both true and insightful. But the whole is so flawed by hasty generalization, over-interpretation of texts to fit a pre-determined scheme, and lack of sympathetic balance that this reviewer found herself constantly wishing that the whole could have been redone with more care. Fearing that this frustration was simply the result of too close an acquaintance with the matter, I tried chapters out on educated, non-theologian, non-historian friends and students. Most came away with the feeling of "being had" even though they could not distinguish true from false or from mere conjecture. Those who belonged to somewhat esoteric religious groups were able to hold out the longest but were offended for a different reason. Pagels, they felt, pushes the obvious correlation between certain Christian monarchic images of the one God and the development of monarchic forms of church authority to the point of obscuring genuine, gnostic concern with "deeper truth." Certainly religious symbols are tied to social and political realities, but so what? they say.

This little experiment forced me to explain to my victims what might be of value in the book. First of all, it brings home the great diversity in second century Christianity, something many people are still not conscious of. The Christianity, both orthodox and otherwise, of the first three centuries was quite different from the institutionalized churches we take for granted. Secondly, as do many modern Jewish thinkers, the ancient gnostics challenge Christians to face up to the problematic character of the theological constructions they use to hold "Old" and "New" Testaments together as a unitary revelation of the divine. Finally, Pagels's discussion of the detailed connections between images of God, of salvation, and of community and its structures of authority, remind us that images of the divine are to be used with care. Further, the necessary interconnection of community life and authority patterns with images of God should perhaps remind some would-be reformers that haphazard shifts in structure or liturgy are hardly enough to be effective. The unreflective use of images in one sphere of religious life and discourse may well subvert the insights of another.

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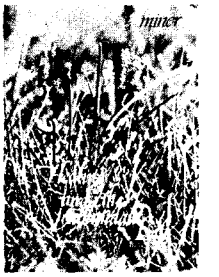

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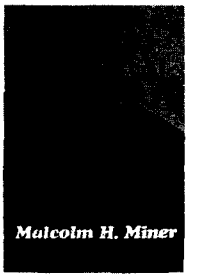

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Art history: argument-by-anecdote

THE OBSTACLE RACE:
The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work

Germaine Greer

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $25, 373 pp.

Maureen Mullarkey

W. H. AUDEN once remarked: "It's less morally confusing to be goosed by a traveling salesman than by a bishop." Anyone who picks up *The Obstacle Race*, Germaine Greer's first book since *The Female Eunuch* of 1970, is likely to get goosed. And that's too bad, because Greer comes on like a bishop.

Despite Greer's assumed role as a "feminist art historian," the book isn't history. It isn't even passionate criticism. It is a facile potboiler, the latest and glossiest reminder that women can still cash in on each other as a *cause célèbre*. *The Obstacle Race* is scholarship parodying itself and one would like to think it was written tongue-in-cheek. But no, it is intended as straight socio-historical analysis.

In 1971 Vassar art historian Linda Nochlin published an essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in the anthology *Art and Sexual Politics*, edited by Thomas Hess and Elizabeth Baker. The essay looked forward to a feminist critique of art history that, if answered adequately, could "provide a paradigm" for the tendency of women to settle, like sediment, to the bottom in other fields as well.

Without crediting Nochlin for the germinal idea or its thematic breakdowns, Greer attempts just such a paradigm. What she achieves is a coffee-table catalogue of also-rans that only underscores the rueful implications of women's absence from the roster of masters.

Greer labels Nochlin's title query "a false question" and shifts attention to "the real question: What is the contribution of women to the visual arts?" It is an evasion that permits Greer to substitute compilation for inquiry.

The listing of names is relentless. Many of the names belong to women whose claim to attention rests less on a body of work than on their resemblance to the heroines of 19th century dime novels. Everything is mentioned; little is discussed. What discussion there is is cursory and misleading. Not knowing what questions to ask of her data, Greer's emphasis throughout is on tone rather than substance. For instance in discussing the middle ages and the Renaissance, there is no attempt to clarify the position of women *vis-à-vis* the status of the arts. In an age that recognized art work for the manual labor that it is, wishing to be an artist was like wishing to be a shoemaker. Painting was a trade like any other and, like all crafts under the guild system, largely a family business. There were few "openings" for men or women outside the family workshop.

Towns maintained anonymous pools of artists into the Renaissance. Were women excluded from these low-status pools initially? Or were they gradually eased out as the creation of *peintures du roi* slowly changed the position of painters from anonymous artisans to status symbols of the court? What were the strictures and conditions that permitted women into certain craft guilds while denying them entry to others?

It would be useful to know these things

REVIEWERS

ROBERT G. HOYT is executive editor of *Christianity and Crisis* and one of the editor-writers of *The Terrible Choice: The Abortion Dilemma* (Bantam).

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DAVID O'BRIEN teaches history at the College of the Holy Cross, in Worcester, Massachusetts and is the author of *The Renewal of American Catholicism*.

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in gaining an understanding of women's history in the arts. But *The Obstacle Race* isn't all that interested in either the stuff of history or of art. The real subject of the book is not women as artists but Greer herself as a gentleman-scholar. Greer wants us to know that the racy, irreverent upstart of *The Female Eunuch* earned a mortar-board.

It is a curiously inarticulate book. Greer has trouble deciding what sense to make of her own inventory. She ducks and dives into the data in search of significance with the compulsion of a waterfowl hunting for a meal. She swallows whatever looks edible, leaving the reader to cough up the weeds. Her prose has no choice but to lie under the weight of so much half-digested roughage. In the end, it is the level of the prose, and its generative logic, that causes Greer's credibility to crack and peel like color from a Florentine fresco.

Greer approaches her subject as if the history of women in art were nothing more than the acting out, over centuries, of the psycho-drama of Svengali and Trilby. She never misses a chance to contrast "the marauding activities of heterosexual men" with the "high moral purpose" and "unremitting search for purity" of her women.

Women's painting "relates to other acts of loving." Men paint just to show off. Never mind all those murals in Mexico City's National Palace: Diego Rivera was just a nasty adulterer. On the other hand, Suzanne Valadon's adulteries "kept her libido intact. . . . She seized what she wanted from art and life, and tore it free with both hands." Tintoretto's force of personality is disparaged as "an overriding artistic ego." The same qualities in a woman evoke song from Greer; "Boldness was her hallmark, boldness of conception, boldness of design, boldness of execution, and she lived with the same uncompromising boldness."

Greer's own word choice gives the book an embarrassingly antique cast. The diction hoists women back onto the same dreary pedestal that has been a major obstacle in any of women's races: women are nicer people than men. Isn't that what the Pennsylvania Academy had in mind when it substituted a cow for a nude model in its life classes for women in the 1880's?

Much of the book reads like Gothic romance. Greer's heroines are encased in that same mixture of overwrought phrasing ("She drank deep of his polluted well") and sensationalism that characterizes pulp confessions. There is, in fact, so much latent hysteria in Greer's use of the word love that one begins to suspect *The Obstacle Race* was written for Salem spinsters.

In her pre-occupation with love as the *bête-noire* of women artists, Greer keeps missing the point of her own anecdotes. Less concentration on "betrayal by sexual love" and greater attention to social assumptions and their attendant economics would have provided more usable insights. It is one thing to decry the circumstances that make the extent of a woman's achievement dependent on the prestige of male promoters and protectors. It is quite another thing to trivialize the fact of that achievement, as Greer does, by using it as a sentimental warning against "the power of love."

If there is little to be learned here about women, there is even less to be learned about the making of art. Face to face with the processes and demands of art ("pusillanimous, pettifogging, bourgeois art"), Greer goes right on pulling the rug out from under her own claim to seriousness. She has little understanding of the ways in which a painter's vocabulary is acquired and no comprehension of the function of artistic influences. Influence is presented as a kind of rape.

She has a naive preference for "spontaneity" without quite knowing what that means in a work of art and with no grasp of the extent to which painfully acquired discipline informs successful spontaneity.

She talks about "excellence" but has no criteria for it. Her inability to focus coherently on what is meant by artistic quality leaves her resorting to an apology for women's work that is based on the denigration of men's. She gives the game away when she tells us that Degas's drawing is "weak" next to Suzanne Valadon's or that Diego Rivera achieved nothing but "rhetoric."

The single most poignant truth to emerge from this book is that scoring points with anecdotes is not the same thing as making meaning out of historical data. Anecdotes are the small talk of history. They are more apt to titillate than inform.

Argument-by-anecdote turns out to be no argument at all. The angularities of history are too numerous to permit anyone to play the point-system as superficially as Greer does and get away with it. For every anecdote featuring the pathos of a woman's predicament, there are corresponding anecdotes about men in parallel predicaments. True, it is "one of the more galling ironies of history" that the works of Gwen John, unvalued in her lifetime, are now financing the Centre des Etudes Maritain. But it is no more galling than the current 6-figure sales of the same paintings that brought Modigliani, in his lifetime, no more than the price of a meal.

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At heart, *The Obstacle Race* is not a new book. It is *The Female Eunuch* gone artsy and gussied up with footnotes (listing sources in the obligatory French and German) in a strained attempt at academic respectability.

Remembering the resistance

WITH CLUMSY GRACE
The American Catholic Left, 1961-1975

Charles A. Meconis
Seabury, $8.95, 224 pp.

David O'Brien

THE FRONT-PAGE evening-TV appearance of priest-criminals and sister-radicals remains one of the most startling features of a period of American history best captured in historian William O'Neal's *Coming Apart*. For a while "the Berrigans" symbolized the apparent disintegration of the nation and its supposedly most conservative, dependable religious institution. Media and participants alike exaggerated the importance of the "Catholic Left"; national politics changed little, the cultural revolution was the shortest lived in history, and the church was hardly reconstructed on pacifist or socialist lines. Yet the years of resistance were for some participants a "holy time" when they "were living at the top of [their] freedom," when lives were changed, ripples spread, and for them at least, things would never again be the same. That such protesting Catholics once existed, to say nothing of the fact that some are still around, is enough to draw regular outbursts of sarcastic scorn from Andrew Greeley. For those less insecure, there are life stories in the anti-war resistance as important for us as was the lonely witness of a Jagerstatter for the postwar generation. Reading Charles Meconis's admittedly flawed book may help insure that some at least learn something and do not forget everything.

With Clumsy Grace is a kind of collective autobiography, a memoir, based on trial transcripts, some excellent oral history, and a poorly selected list of publications. Here is the history of an important portion of the Catholic peace movement, those who risked jail, as they understand that history. Meconis traces their paths including his own, from early personal decisions to resist the war, through pacifist draft card burning, the wildfire spread of draft board raids, and the long trials which drained funds and divided friends, to the gradual erosion of networks of communications and "actions communities" amid charges of "elitism and sexism." Meconis has not written as he intended the "critical history of the Catholic Left as a social movement," but he has provided a story of real people living "with clumsy grace" in a hard time. Their awakened consciences led them to a simple opposition to the war. Many then stumbled into a supposedly revolutionary commitment to end capitalism and imperialism; then came the final realization that the radical commitment must be universal, embracing all the above and patriarchy as well. Neither the author nor his subjects yet realize that the progression has been experienced before; hostile to established peace organizations and leaders, suspicious of all forms of "elitism" and in many cases well distanced from the church, if not its faith, they remain unable to understand their world or to seize their time; much less are they able yet to write their own history.

While agreeing that the media title "Catholic Left" is "sociologically inaccurate," Meconis nevertheless supplies an appendix of 232 names of the "core members" of just that group, those who took part in " 'serious' (e.g. felonious) nonviolent action to protest the war in Indochina," admitting as well some who took "equivalent risks," such as refusing to testify before grand juries. Omitted are Dorothy Day, Gordon Zahn and Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, to say nothing of the hundreds of persons equally opposed to "poverty, racism and war" but unsure that the "core group" knew what it was doing. Another appendix indicates that only 54% of the identified membership on whom information was available identified themselves as Catholic. Finally, the word "left" itself is questionable, for the "risky action" criteria fits no clear political or ideological category. In the text, Meconis provides little analysis of his data, relying instead upon his interviews and selected publications. He claims that the group significantly influenced opinion in and out of the church, but provides no real evidence to support the contention. Finally, critics will find plenty of ammunition in the interviews: here is a woman who reports that by the time she joined the resistance, she had come to look upon her religious community "only as a base of operations"; here are the simplistic criticisms of the church as irretrievably implicated in imperialism, capitalism and war; here too, is that awkward, embarrassing use of profanity and street jargon by priests and sisters with MAs and PhDs.

Yet, we also find the innocence, seriousness, and real courage which marked the resistance. Beneath it all are large, very large truths we would all prefer to forget. In their shocked confrontation with the brutalities of the modern world, these people found little guidance and less help from theologians, scholars, political or ecclesiastical leaders. The real reason they continue to disturb, even enrage, is that they exposed the reality of our situation in this century of war. Those of us who are more "responsible" than the Berrigans and their friends refuse to admit that things are *that* bad; if we can only find the right combination of critical intelligence, military power, moral realism, and personal patience, everything will come out sane in the end. Perhaps in our uneasy arrogance we have reason to be grateful that at least some people insisted, and continue to insist, that more is needed. When they were younger and had not yet learned the need for realism, or "hard analysis," or patience, there was then a "holy time;" for us there never was. Might we suspect, in some dark recess of our hearts, that someday there must be? Asking that question need not mean we move into Philip Berrigan and Liz McAlister's Jonah House, but it could suggest that now as in 1968, the proper response to

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these lives is to deal as best we can with the realities of war and injustice, not to dismiss,discredit, and denounce those naive enough to name the evils. For all its lack of analysis and insight, Meconis's book brings the ripples of real lives of real Americans, some of the best, to the shores of our consciences, and for that we should be grateful.

Correspondence

(Continued from page 612)

on "old psychoanalytic sources" and never seem to "have heard of the likes of Kagen and Piaget who cast a different light on early child development." Why would I want to bow to the very *au courant* Kagan and Piaget who have so very little to say about my primary concern—the *emotional* health and well-being of children? Emotions may be passé in sophisticated and cognitively oriented psychological circles, but for those who still share Silvan Tomkin's conviction that "affects are the primary motives of man," then serious attention must be given to the ways in which young and old *feel* about themselves, their past histories, the quality of their personal relationships and their institutions. Unfortunately, in western Ireland I was to observe a socio-cultural system that (for the most part) constrained the expression of love and tenderness and the flowering of human potential.

Callahan asks why I never raise the question as to whether "some repressions are worth the price." I find it difficult to believe that she considers the alarming rates of mental hospitalization, alcoholism and permanent celibacy in rural Ireland today as a small price to pay in the name of preserving the Jansenist "ideals" of "self-discipline," sexual repression, and the value of a "happy death." I cannot reply except to suggest that the reviewer spend some time in a mental hospital, or in a pub for that matter, talking with a self-hating alcoholic or a morbidly depressed 48-year-old bachelor son.

While I do make the point that rural Irish socialization is less stressful for girls than boys, I would not go so far as Ms. Callahan in representing the rural village as a kind of feminist haven. Indeed, if this were so it might stem the tide of female emigrations. Unfortunately, what is psychologically destructive to one sex, cannot help but negatively affect the other. An unemployed, alcoholic, or depressed or emotionally disturbed father or husband or brother is certainly no boon to the "matrifocal" household. A truly responsive human community is one that is sensitive to the needs of young as well as old, male as well as female. This, from a "devout" feminist.

Finally, as to the well-raised issues concerning confidentiality, informed consent, village reaction, and the ethics of social science "invasion" in a small, fiercely private community like "Ballybran," I can only reply that I was open and direct in presenting myself as an anthropologist, writer and researcher. I took copious notes quite openly, and struck from the record of a conversation whatever villagers requested me to delete. I used no hidden or "unobtrusive measures" other than those which my own body provided: eyes, ears, touch. I was careful to present only case history materials of mental patients who did not originate from the parish in which I was based. If I dared to quote a villager's comment to me as we "waited on a slow moving confessional line" (as a rather shocked Ms. Callahan would protest) it was only to record the old woman's confusion and ambivalence toward the sacrament, not to reveal any personal information on the state of her soul. I sent advance copies of the page proofs to a number of key persons in the Republic, including a village "key informant." None suggested any changes. As to whether the people of Ballybran are going to feel "betrayed" by what I wrote, I cannot deny that this is a possibility. Many will no doubt see themselves in those pages—and that will be a painful experience for some, and cause anger in still others. Some, I trust, will take courage in seeing that their own personal troubles are but manifestations of larger social and cultural ills that can be reversed and changed.

After the English, says Callahan, comes the invading social scientist. Nay—after the English comes the invasions of the condescending Yankee tourist, and the Common Market with its Voluntary Retirement Scheme, paving the way for "agribusiness" and the rape of the small farmer and shepherd and fisherman. The powerless and penniless anthropologist only watches and listens and records. Words, words, words, as Hamlet said. Would that words *were* magical and powerful and *could* invade and undo the sorrowful laments of the Irish country people—saints, scholars and schizophrenics among them.

NANCY SCHEPER-HUGHES

Dr. Sheper-Hughes is presently a post-doctoral fellow at the Laboratory of Human Development, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University.

The author replies

Limitations of space keep me from arguing the points in my review all over again, although there is a lot more evidence for my judgments than I could cram into the original short review. Interested readers will have to read the book, my review and this exchange in order to decide upon the disputed questions.

But one point simply can't be passed over, and that is the claim that Dr. Scheper-Hughes can ignore at will what has been called psychology's cognitive revolution. It turns out that feelings, emotions and even a sense of self, are no longer seen as *separate* from perception and cognitive processing of information. Symbolic thinking has everything to do with emotional health and anyone who has done their homework in psychology and child development knows it.

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

Thanks

Sewanee, Tenn.

To the Editors: Thanks for running Fleming Rutledge's "The Pope and the Nations" in your September 14 issue. It cuts quickly and clearly to the heart of the problem and is especially apt in relating the biblical understanding of power to the nuclear arms race.

JOHN M. GESSELL

Editor, *St. Luke's Journal of Theology*

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